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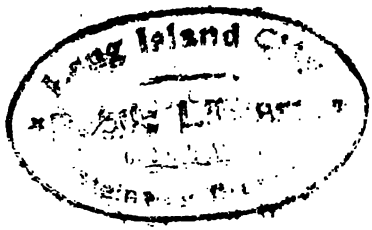

BY FLORENCE MARRYAT
(MRS. ROSS CHURCH).

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WOMAN AGAINST WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

AT GIBRALTAR.

My story is not a common story (or I trust so), and yet the scene with which it opens is a common scene enough. Fancy the garden of a villa, situated midway on the steep sides of Gibraltar Rock, with the rays of a Mediterranean sunset creeping over the sea, and lighting up each leaf and flower — each pane of glass and whitened wall, until both Nature and Art flushes red as a maiden's cheek beneath her lover's gaze; and last (though first), those component parts of the world's curse and blessing, love — a man and woman — and you have the place, time, and *dramatis personæ* of the first picture I want you to draw for yourself.

The subject under discussion between them did not appear to have been of a pleasant nature, if one might judge by the expression of their faces, for they both looked troubled. He was leaning against a portion of trellis-work which surmounted part of the low wall, with his eyes fixed upon her changing features. She, sitting on the wall itself, hung over it almost too carelessly, as she looked across the quiet waters of the bay, and thought.

With a small, slight figure, and a dark skin, the girl (she was only a girl) was more piquante than pretty. Indeed, with the exception of a good complexion, through which upon occasions the damask blood showed clearly, and a pair of liquid hazel eyes, she had little pretentions to beauty of any decided order. But she possessed a higher gift than beauty: she was fascinating — dangerously so. There was more danger for men in the society of this little brown girl, with her ready blood, her killing glances, when she turned eyes upon them that could flash like diamonds when she was angry, or grow misty with unshed tears when she was moved — her arch, unstudied manner, and her animated conversation — than in association with the biggest, fairest Juno in creation, who was incapable of feeling the same excitement, or saying the same things. As she sat now upon the low wall, her hazel eyes, black from their intensity of thought, gazing into space; her wavy rust-coloured hair, appearing from its quantity almost too heavy for the small head it graced; and her bust, which was large for the slight waist beneath it, clearly defined against the evening sky — it would have been a critical eye indeed, and a cold heart, that could have found serious fault with the charms of Rachel Norreys.

She was not a Venus in form, nor an angel in disposition, but she was better than either. She was a warm, impulsive, energetic woman, as quick to resent an injury to others as she was to confess a fault of her own; passionate in temper, yet open as the day; passionate in feeling, but faithful unto death. She had not yet completed her one-and-twentieth year; and yet to look at her, one would have fancied she was older than the man who was leaning against the trellis-work, and staring at her. His thirty years had passed in such a prosperous, pleasant, indolent way, that they had left few traces upon his handsome features; whilst the nervous creature before him had lived twenty-four months in every twelve ever since she had awakened to the meaning of that great word, Life. But in personal appearance her

companion had decidedly the advantage over her. He was really very good-looking, quite an Apollo, so far as the inexorable exigencies of civilization and the irrefutable laws of his Bond Street tailor would permit one to judge; too much of an Apollo, indeed, to leave much room for anything but good-temper, and the strong sense of honor which, thank God, no true-bred English gentleman has ever yet been found too stupid to possess, beneath that low forehead, which was so very much on a line with the straight Grecian nose. Added to which, he had almond-shaped, sleepy blue eyes, and long fair moustaches and whiskers, and was, in fact, Captain Cecil Craven, of Her Majesty's 3rd Regiment of Royal Bays.

He was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow — a fact which was, perhaps, in itself a sufficient excuse for many of the faults and follies of his useless life. For these widowed mothers with only sons have a vast deal to answer for in this world; and Cecil Craven's mother had proved no exception to the general rule. Left very rich by her late husband, her great desire had been that her son should not follow any profession, but live at home with her, looking after and enjoying what was his own and hers. And had it not been that beneath those handsome, effeminate features there lay hidden a tolerable amount of determination (generally shown by persistently going the wrong way), Cecil Craven had never entered the Bays — above all, followed the fortunes of his regiment upon foreign service. But his ideas of pleasure differed from those of his mother. Gibraltar suited his fancy, and therefore Gibraltar had had the honour of his presence for the last three years. He had been known for a longer time than that to the girl by his side, although she had not met him as a man until she also came to Gibraltar. But her father had been, and was still, an intimate friend of his mother's, and many of her school holidays had been spent at Craven Court, where she had always commanded a great amount of attention. At the time this story opens, the 3rd Royal Bays had already received orders to return to England, and was daily expecting the arrival of the transport containing the regiment destined to relieve it.

The girl was the first to break the silence, so suddenly and impetuously that she almost made her companion start.

"I *cannot* believe it, Captain Craven," were the passionate words; "I *will* not believe it; oh, say it is not true — that it cannot be true!"

"I wish I could, for your sake and my own," he rejoined, as her eyes went upward to meet his, almost imploringly; "but I am afraid it is only too true. I have been speaking on the subject again with him this morning, and his assertions are too strong for disbelief. But don't let it trouble you so, Rachel," he continued, with an attempt at consolation as he saw the light die out of the dark, humid eyes, and the heavy eyelashes droop again despondingly. The apparent supineness of his words kindled all the fire in her nature.

"Don't let it trouble me!" she exclaimed, loudly; "how can I help its troubling me? It has haunted me every moment since I heard it, it will haunt me till the last hour of my life. Oh! may God's curse!" —— and then she stopped short, blushing deeply, and lowered her tone; "I didn't mean that, Captain Craven; I forgot — please forgive me; but I am infinitely miserable!"

Cecil Craven's sleepy blue eyes had opened as wide as nature would permit them to do, as he heard her last exclamation, and they had scarcely resumed their normal condition when he said, in answer,

"Do you know, I am almost afraid of you, Rachel!"

"Why?" she asked, quickly.

"Bec[illegible] so hasty; so — what d'ye call it; you'll be letting it all ou[illegible] u know what you are about."

[illegible] visibly as she answered him, but he was not a man to [illegible] "I swore, did I not?" she said; and to *him*, "why need you [illegible]

[illegible] he went on to say, without appearing to notice the interruption, "so much as for ——, there are others involved in it, and in a quarter —— it would hurt *one* very much, Rachel; I have never received *anything but affection* and consideration, yet, and —— you don't suppose I *don't feel it?*"

His sentences were broken, as if he scarcely knew how to express himself, and a glow very much like shame had overspread his honest face the while.

"You need not be in the least afraid," the girl repeated, still looking away from him and over the sea; "a promise has always been a sacred thing with me. I cannot remember having broken one yet. This will be doubly so—for many reasons. Death shall not wrest the truth from me—whatever I suffer," she said in a lower tone, and then assuming a more cheerful one, added, "and now let us change the subject, Captain Craven. We can find a pleasanter one if we try."

But to turn a conversation quickly from an unpleasant to a pleasant subject is by no means an easy task, particularly if the former is one which materially affects your happiness, and has engrossed your mind for days past. Rachel Norreys and Cecil Craven felt it to be so, and for many minutes after her last words they preserved a total silence. The scene before them was a very lovely one. The garden in which they stood, and which lay at the back of the house, scarcely deserved the name, consisting of nothing more than a long belt of grass, with a few flowering shrubs to break its monotony; but it overlooked the sea. Before them lay the deep-blue waters of the Mediterranean, like a broad sheet of glass, with vessels of all sizes, shapes, and characters riding snugly at anchor upon its bosom. On one side lay the convict-hulks, black and surly-looking, whilst round and about their dark bodies the light skiffs and pleasure-boats, with their white sails and colored awnings, went darting to and fro, and still nearer inland might be seen the mail-packet from England, which had arrived that afternoon, and was employed in the unpleasant business of taking in coal, whilst her passengers were pleasure-seeking on shore. On the broad road which ran alongside of the water's edge, they might have been encountered in noisy, happy parties, harmlessly riotous in their excess of animal spirits, mixed up with groups of equestrians, and carriages full of residents turning out for their evening's amusement. And looking beyond all this—beyond the carriages and horses, the pleasure-boats and convict-hulks—beyond the sea itself—the opposite shores of Africa were just visible in the clearness of the evening air—although the warmth was still the warmth of a summer's day.

This time Cecil Craven was the first to speak—

"You know the steamer has arrived?" he said, interrogatively.

All the color faded out of her face—

"Not the transport!" she exclaimed.

"No, no. The mail. How I frightened you, Rachel! but you know we may expect the other at any moment."

"I am aware of it," she answered; "but I hope against Hope, and try to cheat myself into believing something may detain it."

"What if it should come? Do you think Dr. Browne is too ill to travel?"

"I am afraid so," she said, sadly. "He has certainly not gained strengh during the last week. Sometimes I fancy he will never be strong again."

"Oh, nonsense! That is only your fancy," said her companion, though he knew the girl was right; "but even supposing that he could not sail with the headquarters——"

Rachel interrupted him, "We should have to stay here," she said; and then added, hurriedly, "I can't bear the thoughts of it, Captain Craven! The transport is not likely to arrive so soon, is it? for I shall never see any of you again, if it does."

Her face was so distressed that he attempted to soothe her, against his conscience.

"No, no, far likelier to be delayed than not. Sometimes they keep a corps under orders for home for months. And what, if it does come? Dr. Browne would rejoin as soon as he was able. We should all be together again before long."

"But not me," said the girl, shaking her head, "not me. You forget, Captain Craven."

"Is that likely to come to pass so soon, then, Rachel?"

"Papa," she began, and then hesitated, but went on directly afterwards with a *slight stamp of* her foot to emphasize the word. "Papa says so.

He says it cannot be long now; he is always talking of it, he makes me wretched whenever he mentions the subject."

"It is the strangest thing I ever heard of," remarked Captain Craven, reflectively; "can't you remember him at all?"

"Remember him!" she repeated, impatiently, "of course I can. Cannot you remember things that took place when you were sixteen? I remember him only too well."

"What is he like?" he asked, nothing daunted by her manner.

"Why do you want to know?" she rejoined quickly, and then added, "when we were—when I knew him—he was tall—no, not very tall, about as tall as you are now, with dark eyes and hair; brown eyes, at least I think so, or grey—but I almost forget his face, it is so long ago. I know he was thin and tallish, and had no whiskers."

"You like men then with dark eyes and hair, and without any whiskers," remarked Cecil Craven, with what was intended to be a careless air, as he fondly drew his own through and through his fingers.

She jerked her shoulders impatiently, and something of a frown came over her face.

"You know I do not," was all she said, in reply.

"Have you no picture of him?"

"No."

"Really?"

"Why really?" she said again, looking up.

"What! no picture to look at every spare moment, and talk to, and kiss, and put under your pillow every night. I thought that was what all ladies did when they were in love."

"I don't know anything about it," she answered, biting her lips.

"Are you not longing for the time to arrive when he shall come home? I suppose he will stay on shore for good now, won't he?"

He was torturing her, and he knew it. Rachel Norreys, still sitting with her face turned from him, let the tears rise to her eyes in mute reply, and drop thence upon her lap without so much as noticing their fall.

"It will be all right then, Rachel," he continued, "will it not? You will forget all about the poor 3rd, and the days we have passed at old Gib together, eh?"

Then she could stand it no longer, and all her attempted show of pride and unconcern melted away beneath something rising in her heart.

"Oh, Captain Craven," she cried, "do you want to kill me? Don't torture me in this way. You know I shall be wretched and miserable: I feel as if I *couldn't* leave the 3rd, and Elise, and all of you. I know I shall never have a happy day afterwards. Oh? you are very cruel to me—you are *very, very* cruel!"

She was crying violently now. She sobbed and sobbed with her face in her hands till he was afraid that not only the inmates of the house, but the passers-by beneath the garden wall would hear her, and be alarmed. So he tried to pull her hands apart, and when he found he could not do so, he commenced to pour soothing words into her ear.

"Rachel, dear Rachel!" he said, "pray don't cry; I meant nothing. I was only in fun. I dare say none of these horrible things will come to pass. I bet we have months of happiness here together still. My dear girl, don't cry."

He had knelt on one knee beside her, trying to look into her face as he spoke; but she kept it persistently covered with her hands. The path on which they were (and which ran along the inside of the wall) was partially hidden from the house by a few clumps of shrubs, and as he was attempting to console her, and she remained with her face still buried, a step came across the grass, and round the shrubs, before they were cognisant of any one's approach. It was only a servant with a note—the wife of one of the soldiers of the regiment who had been promoted to the place of maid to Dr. Browne's daughter some little time before, She was a tall, angular woman, with sharp, black eyes, and hair growing low on her forehead, in what is termed a "widow's peak." A woman with a vindictive temper and a quiet respectful voice,—a woman whom her mistress hated, had hated from the first, and, trusting to the instinct of her nature, should never have

taken into her service. As she appeared now, noiselessly creeping under the sheltering shrubs, Captain Craven sprang to his feet at once, and Rachel, uncovering her wet face, without time to conceal her emotion, asked her what she wanted.

"Only a note for Mrs. Norreys from Mrs. Arundel," said the woman, with a sufficiently perceptible emphasis on the first title to have made a stranger turn at once to look for the wedding-ring upon Rachel's left hand. Yes, it was there, although almost hidden by three or four ordinary rings which surmounted it. As Mrs. Norreys took the note and looked the woman in the face, the return glance that met hers had something in it that roused her quick temper.

"Why cannot you walk like other people, Caroline?" she demanded, angrily, "instead of sneaking down the garden as if you wanted to listen to what was being said."

"Sneaking!" echoed the woman, with eyes full of a respectfully reproachful surprise; "I walked as I always do walk, Mrs. Norreys, and I didn't suppose I was likely to hear anything that I should not—"

"Go away," said Mrs. Norreys, shortly; and as the servant disappeared, she exclaimed with warmth, "I hate that woman, Captain Craven: she is always listening at keyholes and opening drawers; I know she is, and yet if I ever catch her at it she has always a ready excuse. She's a horridly sly creature!"

"Rather dangerous, though, isn't it," remarked Captain Craven, who had not liked the expression in the servant's face, "to make an enemy of a woman like that? They are very revengeful sometimes."

"Revengeful," said Rachel, opening her note and her eyes at the same moment. "Why, what harm could she do me? I'll give her warning if I hear any more of it." And then she skimmed her note, with looks still sparkling and cheeks flushed from her late excitement, whilst Cecil Craven switched off the leaves of the wall-creepers, and wished that the servant had not caught them just at that identical moment.

"Elise wants me to go over there this evening after papa is asleep," said Rachel, presently, in reference to her note; "that will not be till nine o'clock. Are you going, Captain Craven?"

"Yes; Mrs. Arundel asked me this morning, when we were riding together, if I would look in after mess. We seem always to be meeting there now, don't we? This will make the third time this week."

"If you would rather I did not go——" said Rachel demurely.

"Rather you did not go!—yes, you know I would rather you did not go, don't you?" he answered, laughing. "Why, Rachel I feel,—that we cannot be too near or dear to one another. You will let me have a little of the affection which I have almost a right, or I feel so, to claim from you?"

She had blushed visibly as he bantered her, but with his last words her looks grew earnest, and as he concluded, her hand stole into his. He accepted the action as answer, and raised it to his lips. Then he said, "How very intimate you seem with Mrs. Arundel: why, you are always there!"

"Pretty nearly always," she replied, gaily; for the little divertissement which her indignation against the servant had occasioned had had the effect of making her lose sight for the time of her previous trouble, and apparently restored her spirits. "I am there every day regularly; I have so few friends, you see, and Elise is the dearest creature possible; she is just like a sister to me; we are inseparable."

"Bosom friends, eh?" said Captain Craven. "I suppose that means that you tell her everything, doesn't it?"

"Not quite everything," answered Rachel, blushing again; "but very nearly: so does she me; she tells me all about her husband, and her private affairs; and I tell her——"

"All about yours," surmised Captain Craven. A dark cloud came over her face, and she was silent. "Well, all about *who* then," he continued; "not all about *me*, I hope, Rachel?"

"I have nothing to tell about you," she answered, though she felt she was not saying the exact truth, and then added, "but why should I not?"

He pulled his moustaches for some time, in hope of pulling out an answer, but it was long coming, she gazing inquiringly into his face the while.

"Well, I don't know," he at last ejaculated; "but still what passes between friends, I think, best kept to themselves."

"But I thought you were great friends with Elise, or you used to be," said Rachel.

It was an innocent remark on her part, but the random shaft hit hard, for, as it happened, Cecil Craven *had* been "very good friends" with Mrs. Arundel, so good, indeed, that to that fact alone might be attributed the reason that he did not now particularly care that she should know he was "very good friends" with anybody else. But however this may have been, he kept it to himself.

"Not such friends as I am with you, Rachel — as I should wish to be with you. Mrs. Arundel may be a very good creature, but——"

"Now, I'll have no 'buts' about dear Elise," interposed Rachel; "she is the best friend I have, Captain Craven, and you shall not abuse her before me."

Captain Craven was about to indignantly refute the accusation of having had the slightest intention of abusing any friend of Mrs. Norreys, when their conversation was interrupted for the second time that evening.

CHAPTER II.

DR. BROWNE AND MRS. NORREYS.

A succession of forced coughs drew off their attention from themselves, and caused their eyes to be simultaneously turned in the direction of the house. Then they perceived the same servant who had brought the note to Rachel, again approaching them with downcast eyes and measured steps, coughing at intervals on her road. Rachel blazed up again immediately.

"What does she mean by coughing?" she said, appealing to Cecil Craven; "does she intend to be insolent?"

Captain Craven thought it looked very much like it, but he only answered for the sake of peace. "Oh, dear no; the evening air——"

"If you please, Mrs. Norreys," said the woman as she came up to them, "the doctor has been inquiring for you several times, and he wishes you to go in to him now. It was the doctor sent me to call you."

"Oh, dear papa is awake! I must go then, Captain Craven; I shall see you again this evening."

This much, as long as the servant was within hearing; but when she had disappeared into the house, Rachel exclaimed in quite a different tone of voice, —

"Now, what does that creature mean by calling me 'Mrs. Norreys,' in that pointed manner? She has never been used to say anything more than 'ma'am;' and papa so often calls me 'Miss Rachel' still, that the servants mostly call me so. What does she mean, Captain Craven?"

She half suspected what she meant by the heightened color in her face and the agitation in her voice; but she wanted him to refute her suspicion for her, which he felt unable to do, for he was too angry himself at what had passed.

"I cannot venture to say," was his guarded reply; "I think I should dismiss her if I were you. There are better women in the regiment. What made you take her?"

"Her husband, Wilson, is one of papa's pets, and so I suppose he thought that Mrs. Wilson must be a pet as well. However, she is none of mine. But I must not stay a moment longer. I never keep my father——"

Here she fancied that the young man's eyes meant more than he ever intended that they should, and stopped short.

"Well," said Captain Craven, in anticipation of the conclusion of her sentence which never came, for tears had rushed at the call of memory

into the honest hazel eyes, and the voice had thickened under the influence of the emotion.

"Don't think me foolish," she commenced, presently, in a broken tone; "but it seems to me that I have no longer any right——I love him so, Captain Craven."

"I love you for it," was all his reply; and then the light figure flitted away from him, with no other farewell than a look of gratitude, until it was lost in the shade of the broad creeper-covered verandah which surrounded the villa, and he was left alone by the garden wall, gazing after her with a feeling of wonder rising in his heart that he never should have discovered how much character Rachel Norreys possessed, until the last few days; and a word nearly akin to an oath upon his lips, as he thought upon the circumstances that had drawn the depths of that character out.

As for her, another minute found her by her father's side. Not by his bedside, but by his sofa, where he lay all the day, although he was scarcely strong enough even to bear the slight fatigue of the constant removals. Dr. Browne had been a fine handsome man before the wasting fever came upon him, which had sapped his strength, whitened his hair, drawn his features, and was daily bringing him lower. A man of not more than fifty years, handsomer far than Rachel would ever be as a woman, but with only half her cleverness, though twice her common sense — common sense which he had exercised in everything, except the bringing up of this motherless girl, whom he had most untiringly and indefatigably spoilt from the first day that she had been committed to his charge.

As Rachel came lightly up to his side and clasped her arms about his neck, Dr. Browne's face gleamed as if the sunshine had looked into the window, and passed over it.

"Well, dear old father," she said, "have you been awake long?"

"No, my dear, only a few minutes; but the orderly has brought round some English letters. Caroline tells me they came at noon."

"So they did, darling; but you were just getting drowsy, and so I told her to put them one side."

"There is one for you, Rachel, or I should not have disturbed you, my dear. Who has been in the garden with you this afternoon?"

"Only Captain Craven," she answered, but she colored slightly as she did so, and a faint sigh escaped her unawares.

Dr. Browne's ear caught the sound and echoed it; then as if to divert the girl's thoughts or his own, he said, quickly: "There is news for you, Rachel — good news from Raymond. I have also heard from him. The 'Agincourt' has left the Cape."

"What?" exclaimed his listener, every particle of color deserting her face, and leaving her eyes suddenly [illegible]led and blank. "What?"

"Don't agitate yourself, my dear," said the doctor, observing her emotion, "perhaps I should not have mentioned it without a little preparation; but I have told you for months that it was likely to happen. The 'Agincourt' was under sailing orders when your husband wrote, and by this time he must be in England. Raymond fancied we should be at home ourselves when his letters reached, and addressed them to the care of his mother, who forwarded them, with a line from herself, to say that she expects her son very shortly. I am afraid he will be disappointed, poor lad, to find we have not left Gibraltar, but we shall not be long after him. Read your own letter, Rachel, it will tell you more than I can."

But Rachel did not make an attempt to read it. She remained immoveable, silent.

Dr. Browne looked at her for some minutes without speaking, and then he said, "Rachel!"

She started, and the recollection of where she was, and what she was doing, returning to her mind, brought the color back in redoubled measure to her cheeks, and the brilliance to her eyes.

"Oh, papa, darling!" she exclaimed, suddenly; and seizing upon a jug which stood amongst a group of heterogeneous articles on a table by his side, "you have not any lemonade left. What is that woman about? Let me fetch it for you," and she prepared to leave him as she spoke.

"*Rachel, my dear!*" he called after her, in his enfeebled voice, "I do

not wish for any. Caroline is gone to make me some coffee, Rachel, my child."

But Rachel was deaf, or rather Rachel chose to be deaf, and was already gone. She did not run away to think, or to cry, or to read her letter in private; she escaped for one minute's respite — one minute only to remind herself that she had borne a greater trouble, heard worse news than this, and without flinching, for his sake; to tell herself that it was inevitable and of her own seeking, that he must not, should not, see the pain it cost her; to remember, with a frightened feeling at her heart that it might not be for long, that it could not be forever, that she should have the option even of dissembling before him, and then the respite was over, and the brave heart (ready to bleed if need be, so long as what it loved was unconscious of its suffering) went back to stand the ordeal of a calm, searching gaze from fatherly eyes. Only a minute — she was not absent longer — an order for more lemonade given, and Rachel was back again, the same girl who rushed in all anxiety for her father's comfort from her broken interview at the garden wall. Back again, to throw herself upon the floor by the sick man's couch, and lean her wearied young head against the side of it.

"You take too much trouble for me, dear Rachel," said Dr. Browne, as he lovingly stroked the ruddy chestnut hair, which lay against his knees.

"I couldn't," she answered, earnestly; "you're better to-day, father, are you not?"

Dr. Browne shook his head.

"Not much stronger, I am afraid, my little girl. Harris doesn't agree with me; but I fancy I know better than he does. If the 'Agincourt' left the Cape on the 1st of April, she ought to be in the Downs by the beginning of June, and this is the 10th. Depend upon it, she is already there. Why don't you read your letter, Rachel?"

"Oh, it will keep," she said, "until you are asleep, darling, or I want something to do."

"I hoped you would have been more interested in your husband's return than that, my dear," answered the doctor, gravely. "I'd lay anything poor Raymond doesn't keep your letters long unopened. The one he has written to me is full of joyous anticipation. The boy loves you, Rachel and dearly, if I mistake not."

She made no reply to this; she only gave the same impatient jerk to her shoulders that we have seen her do before, backed up with a heavy sigh. Dr. Browne heard it, although she had not intended him to do so, and it entered into his soul. The act for which he had blamed himself for so many years! — was the punishment to come upon him only now — now, when he felt life to be slipping away from beneath him? He had loved the girl before him very dearly — loved her from a little infant, for herself alone, with all a parent's doting, blind affection — loved her doubly for the sake of her who had borne her, the mother of this wayward and impulsive Rachel, who, almost as wayward, certainly as impulsive, had yet been the idol of the fresh, warm youth of the man who now lay dying, and reproaching himself, lest the shadow of his early fancy should interpose between him and death, and haunt him out of this world with its reproachful eyes, for the trouble in which he left the daughter she had left him. He had indulged Rachel as he had never had the power nor opportunity to indulge her mother. He had denied her nothing within his reach; he had allowed her fertile mind to run wild, until the weeds had gained such pre-eminence that they threatened to choke all that was so naturally sweet and fruitful there; indulged her until the foolish, imprudent act had taken place which made her "Mrs. Norreys," but which had, at the same time, made her, as he hoped, the wife of a man who, though too young for such a responsibility, loved her, and was loved honorably in return. Of late he had commenced to doubt the latter — to-day, her strange manner had almost made him disbelieve it. But he felt that he must know the truth now — now, before he died, and the silence of the grave rendered all his desires useless; for, if his conjectures were right, something — anything — must be done, rather than his Rachel — his long-loved and cherished child — should be left in the world without him, and unhappy.

"Rachel," he said, very gravely, and the girl could hear his voice tremble as he spoke, "how long is it since you have ceased to care about Raymond's letters and Raymond's return? At one time your head was full of nothing else; now you appear to me always to avoid the subject. It is not possible that you have left off caring for your husband, is it?" and then the sick man added, with increased agitation, "tell me it is not possible, my dear child—tell me it is not true. It was a source of great trouble to me at the time; but I have gradually come to look upon it in a happier light, and latterly have almost rejoiced that it was so, and that I should not leave my girl (for I shall leave you soon, darling) unprotected in a cruel world. Oh, Rachel! you, above all other women, have need of a husband's protection, and you know it. You will not take away my last and best hope from me! You will tell me that, with myself, you are anticipating with pleasure the return of Raymond Norreys?"

Rachel awoke. She had been mentally walking in her sleep for the last few days, her mind almost torpid under the influence of a great shock from which it had not yet recovered; but she had run her head against a wall in her dreamy wanderings, and the concussion roused her. Here was her father, in whose weak state any agitation must prove hurtful, alarmed and anxious for her sake; her secret, which she had held within her own breast for years, permitting it to corrode her heart, and turn all the brightest colors of her life to ashen gray, rather than it should trouble him (to save whose feelings she would have sacrificed herself, far more her own), nearly divulged at such a moment; and all for her own want of tact, her own selfish forgetfulness of everything but her trouble. The shock alarmed her too; for the moment she started, reddened at the direct charge, and then paled as she prepared to answer it; but that over, all was over. From that moment she armed herself to meet the difficulty, and was never, whilst the necessity for concealment lasted, found sleeping on her post again.

"Dearest father," she exclaimed, "what are you thinking of? I will read Raymond's letter at once if that will set your mind at rest about me. I dare say I do not talk so much about him as I used to; but think what a long time it is since I have seen him—five years, darling; why, it's an eternity at my age! I dare say I shan't know him again when we meet, but it won't take long to do that, will it? Only, father, you must get well again. I cannot enjoy anything when you are ill; you forget that it throws a gloom over the pleasantest prospect for me. You *will* get well, dear papa, won't you? and then we will all go to England together and be jolly." And she raised herself as she spoke, until she could throw her arms again about her father's neck, and lay her head on his bosom. If a lie is ever righteous, it must be when we tell it to save the beloved and dying pain. And yet this girl's heart sickened, as she lay in her father's embrace, to think of the one she had just uttered, and her mental ejaculation was, "God forgive me!"

Dr. Browne held her there, and was very silent. He could not deceive her as she had deceived him, and buoy her up with false hopes of his recovery; he believed himself too near eternity to do it. But he caressed her head with his hand, and moved his lips across her forehead, and sent up many an unspoken prayer for his child's happiness wherever he might be.

"Papa, dear," said Rachel, "I want to dismiss Caroline Wilson."

"Dismiss Caroline, my darling—for what?" demanded Dr. Browne, with surprise.

Rachel hesitated a moment before she could say for what; then she answered, "I don't like the woman, papa; I never did; I think she is very sly."

"Have you any particular complaint to lodge against her, Rachel?"

"No, nothing particular; but I am sure she is deceitful; she is always listening at the doors, and trying to pry into everything. It is odious in a person whom you are obliged to have so much about you."

"I am sorry to hear that," said Dr. Browne, "and I am sure Wilson would be sorry to hear it also. I thought she was such a quiet, respectable sort of woman."

"Too quiet for me," remarked Rachel.

"Well, my dear," said the doctor, "you shall do as you like about it, only I should *think it a pity to* give her warning just yet. The relief-transport

may arrive at any moment, and it would be very awkward for you t go on board ship without an attendant; besides, she is very useful to m Rachel; she understands all my little ways now, and I think I should fe her going whilst I am so ill."

"That's quite enough, father," exclaimed Rachel, "if she is any comfo to you, I would keep her if she had horns and a tail, which I believe sl has, if any one would take the trouble to look for them."

Dr. Browne took all her jests in earnest.

"I don't think poor Caroline can be quite so bad as that, dear child," I said, quietly; "but if she is not a favorite o' yours, you will have a goo excuse for dismissing her when you get back to England."

England and Raymond! How the prospect sent the blood back from t woman's heart — a girl in ordinary things, a woman when she thought of thi

"Here is Caroline with your coffee, papa!" was her next exclamatio quickly given, lest any further remarks should be made upon the subjec and overheard. "Let me raise you, darling, whilst she pours it out;" an suiting the action to the word, she passed her young arms, slight and te der though they were, under the wasted frame of the sick man, and pull him gently into a sitting posture.

"Are you going out this evening, Rachel?" he asked, as he received t cup of coffee from the hands of Caroline, and she stood by him ready take it back again when he should have finished.

"Yes, papa — after you are asleep — not before; and only then if y are sure not to want me. Elise asked me to run over for an hour's chat."

"Who is to be there, my dear?" asked her father.

"I don't know," replied Rachel, at first carelessly; but, raising her ey and encountering those of Mrs. Wilson fixed upon her, she corrected h self with an air of defiance which the occasion seemed scarcely to mer "excepting Captain Craven, who was asked to go in the afternoon; t that is the extent of my knowledge. I do not suppose there will be a one else, except poor old Jack."

Poor old Jack being the legitimate appendage from whom Mrs. Arund derived her name, may show, in some measure, the degree of intimacy which Mrs. Norreys had advanced with that lady and her husband.

"Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself, my dear; and you had better te Barnes to call for you and see you home."

Barnes being the doctor's regimental servant and general factotum. Bi Rachel had no need of Barnes; it was no distance; she could come alone or "old Jack" would escort her. She would rather Barnes were n troubled in the matter.

"It would be no trouble for Barnes, sir," said Mrs. Wilson, appealing t Dr. Browne; "he is always up till eleven, or so; and Miss Rachel, of cour wouldn't be home late."

"Miss Rachel" turned a look upon the speaker that ought to have witl ered her; but it did not seem to have any effect, for the servant's eyes wer still fixed in the direction of Dr. Browne's, as if awaiting his decision.

"You had better have Barnes, my dear," he said to his daughter.

"No! I will *not* have Barnes," she answered, angrily. "I can see my self home. I have said before that I do not wish for him."

"I think you had better, ma'am," commenced Caroline.

"Mind your own business!" was her mistress's decisive reply, "and tak those coffee-cups away."

One look from her vindictive eyes, and the woman, muttering under he breath, did as she was desired, and left the room.

"Are you not rather hard upon Caroline, my love?" said Dr. Brown afterwards, as the bonnie head he loved so well nestled up closely to hi again; "you speak so harshly to her."

"I *hate* her," rejoined Rachel: "however, do not let us talk of it, pap darling. I'll make her over to you *in toto;* and the more she keeps out c my way the better I shall be pleased. Let me read to you, father, or sin to you; or what shall it be?"

"*Sing,* dear Rachel; get your guitar, and sing to me." And for som *time afterwards* nothing was heard in the quiet sitting-room but the clea *sweet notes of her* girlish voice as they sounded through the stillness of a *proaching night.*

CHAPTER III.

MRS. NORREYS' BOSOM FRIEND.

Mrs. Arundel—Eliza Arundel, as was her real name—Elise, as she would be called—the wife of "poor old Jack," and the bosom friend of Mrs. Norreys, was rather an ample friend to take to any one's bosom. Metaphorically speaking, however, she was "all that" to my unwary heroine; *c'est-a-dire* she was the recipient of all her news, personal and otherwise, the correspondent of her confidential letter-writing (ah! what worse than folly lies in that confidential letter-writing!), and the adviser in all her little purchases, as well as all her little scrapes. Mrs. Arundel was a very fine-looking woman of, at this time, perhaps eight-and-twenty or thirty years of age. She was tall and fair, and well-covered, with a plump white neck and bust, of which she always showed as much as civilized society permits a lady to do. She had full light-blue eyes, and rather heavily-cut features, particularly about the lower part of the face, where the jaw was large and square, and the chin massive. But she was *fine*, decidedly; some people might think too fine; but every one has their enemies. She was a great contrast to "poor old Jack," who was anything but fine, having a stumpy figure and a bullet head, but who was one of the mildest, most inoffensive men withal, and had laid himself down through life with the greatest good-will to be trampled on, and ignored and insulted by his huge, white Juggernaut of an Eliza, appearing, moreover, blissfully unconscious all the while that her heavy yoke was on him, or that it was anything out of the common way, if it was. There were some children of this ill-fated Jack, who were treated much in the same manner as himself—at least they were kept in the nursery all day long, whilst he was kept in the background; and perhaps of the two, the children felt it the least. He had been married for ten years to Juggernaut, and during that time she had always followed in the track of the Royal Bays, and was as well known in it as the Colonel himself, to whom, indeed, Major Arundel was only second in command. Juggernaut had seen many a youngster enter the corps, who had sprouted his whiskers, gone into debt, sold his commission—married, perhaps, or died; and yet she still remained stationary to shake hands with his successor. Many she had known intimately, for she was a woman fond of men's society, and to not a few had her languishing eyes, and reputation not entirely free from the onus of an undue love for flirtation, proved the means of inoculation with that fever which all must take, sooner or later, which proves fatal to so small a number. Cecil Craven had been one of these victims: indeed, some five years before, when Captain Craven had had nothing better to do, a little scandal had sprung up in the 3rd relative to her intimacy with that gentleman. Whether there was really any truth in the statement never came to light. The report arose, was talked of privately, and commented upon until it reached the ears of its subject, when a good deal was dropped on her part that had been carried on before—at least outwardly. Then the scandal died a natural death; people got tired of discussing it when no fresh food was given them to discuss upon; somebody else did something else naughty, and they had no more time to devote to the flirtation of Mrs. Arundel with Captain Craven. Whether Eliza Arundel had forgotten it in company with her kind friends, as this story develops you will discover for yourselves; one thing is certain, that Cecil Craven had not, for the remembrance of it came rather unpleasantly before him sometimes when he was talking with Rachel Norreys; and he had wished to himself, more than once, that the two ladies were not quite so intimate with one another.

If, however, Mrs. Arundel shared the remembrance with him, she took good care not to let him see that she did so; and as for Rachel, she had no idea that he had ever professed to be more than a friend to her friend. She had often remarked to him, as a trait of goodness in her dear Elise, how perfectly *free she seemed* from jealousy at their predilection for one another's *company, even appearing* to further their intimacy as much as she could by

contriving meetings for them, and bringing them together as often as it was in her power. And Cecil Craven, though he was not a clever man, had shown his sense upon such occasions by holding his tongue and keeping his opinions to himself. On the evening in question he happened to be the first to present himself in Mrs. Arundel's drawing-room.

"Ah! signor," she exclaimed, as she came forward to meet him, in all the glories of a blue silk dress, "something told me *you* would not be behindhand this evening. Now it is no good looking round the room, because I haven't hidden her anywhere. She has not come yet; *patience, mon ami, patience.*"

Mrs. Arundel had an odious habit of continually interspersing her conversation with French and Italian words, which she considered very refined and elegant, and a proof of the society she had mixed in. In reality, however, she knew little or nothing of either language, and the few hack phrases which she compelled to do duty upon all occasions were the extent of her knowledge. Cecil Craven knew them so well, that he could almost have told beforehand which of her stock-in-trade she was about to use. He was accustomed to her remarks, and was always annoyed at them; but on the present occasion he bit his lips, and appeared doubly so.

"Thank you for your advice, my dear Mrs. Arundel," he said, in answer, and rather coolly; "but you had better have kept it for some one who needs it more. Having succeeded in reaching *your* presence, my impatience is at an end. What have you been doing with yourself this afternoon?"

"Ah! you may well ask. What have *you* been doing, that you forgot your promise this morning to bring me those back numbers of the 'Cornhill Magazine' from the mess? I expected you every hour."

Cecil Craven started. He had really forgotten all about it. He was not quick enough to frame an excuse for himself, and so he only looked guiltily conscious. He attempted at last to stammer out a reply; but the lady interrupted him, by laying her full white hand upon his mouth.

"Now, Craven, don't commit yourself. I have no doubt you were better employed. The days are past for that sort of thing. There *was* a time———"

She looked at him with a most languishing glance as she uttered the words; but his eyes were cast down, and did not meet hers. Then he said, shortly,—

"I say, where's Arundel?"

Her face changed immediately, and she attempted to cover her annoyance [illegible] an affectation of great gaiety.

"Jack?—why, the dear old boy's smoking a pipe, of course, after his dinner. You will find him in the dining-room, if you want him, Captain Craven."

"I do wish to say a word to him, Mrs. Arundel, if you'll excuse me for leaving you. I'll be back directly."

"Pray don't hurry yourself," she replied, sarcastically.

But the tone was lost upon him; for he availed himself of her permission without so much as turning his eyes again in the direction of her figure; and when he had left the room, the look she sent after him was almost one of hate. People do not talk to themselves aloud in real life, but they do hold communion with their own hearts, and the conversation is audible enough to themselves, and as impressive as if it had been uttered. In Eliza Arundel's heart were running at that moment sentences very akin in meaning to the following, although not a word passed her angry, trembling lips:—

"You have not forgotten what has passed between us, Cecil Craven, although you try to make me believe that you have done so, because you have taken a fancy in another direction, and are tired of our intimacy. You delight in making me jealous; but you shall never have the pleasure of seeing that I am so again. It is useless trying to win you back at present—I only injure my own cause by the attempt; but wait until I have you in my power, and then see if it was worth your while to throw my regard on one side directly it suited your convenience to do so."

There is no doubt her thoughts ran somewhat in this strain, as there is no doubt that she hated to watch the intimacy between Cecil Craven and a particular friend, and yet apparently did all she could to further it.

"Amica mia!" she enthusiastically exclaimed, half an hour later, as Rachel, all white muslin and green ribbons, with her guitar in one hand and her hat in the other, ran into the room, and was folded in her arms, "I have been dying for you to come; for, of course, a *certain* gentleman found Jack and smoking more conducive to his enjoyment than the drawing-room, since *somebody* had not arrived. However, we shall see him in again now, or I am very much mistaken. How is the dear pater to-night, carissima mia?"

"No better, I am afraid, Elise. He seemed as weak as a child when we put him to bed. The weather is so hot and so trying."

"And yourself, petite, how wags the world with you? I have not seen you all to-day. I thought you were lost, or had eloped with a party who shall be nameless."

"Oh, Elise, *don't!*" implored Rachel, whilst a vivid blush mounted up to her forehead, and spread itself over all her features.

"Pardon, cherie, j'ai tort. I forgot that such things were only done, not spoken of. Have you any news?"

"Yes, indeed," sighed Rachel, "bad news for me. What do you think, dear Elise—the 'Agincourt' was expected at home the beginning of this month?"

"Ciel!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, in a tone of horror, "ma pauvre petite. But you are joking, Rachel, surely!"

"No, indeed, I am not," replied poor Rachel, who scorned to desert her native language in ordinary converse, "it is too true: we received the letters by this afternoon's mail. Oh, Elise! what shall I do? What a miserable, wretched girl I am! I feel as if I should like to drown myself."

She threw her arms around her friend's neck as she spoke, and cried.

"Oh, my dear Rachel!" said Mrs. Arundel, forgetting her French in her desire to stop the girl's tears, "I dare say Mr. Norreys will turn out a very charming fellow, and you will get on very nicely together. Dear me! a handsome young husband coming home is nothing to cry about. I wish I was half so lucky myself."

"Oh! how can you talk in that way, Elise, when you know all? I feel as if I could not live until the ship comes home,—as if there was nothing to live for."

"Tais-toi, cherie, tais-toi," said her friend, as she tapped the girl's back with her fan; "you must learn not to talk of such things, whatever you may think. You are a silly child—you must let all that little business rest between you and me; come, dry your eyes—I hear the gent' en' coming—corragio, amica mia."

She did not tell the girl to be brave, and look forward to the expected advent of her husband as a future of love and happiness for herself. She did not tell her, that, whatever that future might prove, her duty in it could not be otherwise than plain. She did not caution her (where it was evident she considered caution necessary) against cherishing an unlawful affection, and laying up a remorse for herself which might never die. If she had, what might she not have saved her from—what trouble, already advancing in the unknown hereafter towards the heart of Rachel Norrey's might not, at such friendly warning, have turned its steps another way, and never borne a closer inspection! But Eliza Arundel did none of this. On the contrary, her first appeal, on the entrance of her husband and Captain Craven, was to the latter gentleman to come to her aid, and attempt the consolation of "cette pauvre petite."

"Really, Captain Craven, you must come and help me to scold this naughty little thing, who is crying her eyes out about nothing at all, at least that *I* can see; but you are a privileged person, I know, and perhaps she may tell you more than she has me. Come, go along both of you, and have a good talk in the verandah. I know you don't want me, and, what's more, I don't want you; for I am going to have my old Jack all alone this evening, and give him a good scolding for something he has done naughty. Now, Major Arundel, what have you to say for yourself?"

It was Mrs. Arundel's way sometimes, when she wished to be facetious, to affect the playful tyrant over poor old Jack, but as that gentleman

joyed an unvarying supply of the real article in private, he never seemed to care much about the imitation. And on the present occasion his feebly-expressed desire to know the reason why he should be dragged away from the presence of his guests against his will, was so vehemently backed by both Rachel and Captain Craven that unitedly they gained the day.

Rachel had lifted her glowing face, upon which the tears had quickly dried with shame at their discovery, from the shoulder of her friend as soon as ever she heard the first appeal to Captain Craven on her behalf. The girl was annoyed that it should be so; she might tell him as much as she chose herself, but she could not understand why Elise should wish to draw general attention to the fact of her distress and its cause. She thought that women were intended to hide such things for one another. During Mrs. Arundel's next words she stood apart, a little proudly, and disclaimed eagerly all wish or need of consolation from any one; and when her friend attempted to force her to a private interview with Cecil Craven as if he possessed the right as well as the means of comforting her, the protest she put in against any such arrangement had sufficient vehemence in it to be almost indignant.

"Just as you like, my dears," said Mrs. Arundel, when Cecil Craven's entreaty that the party should not be separated was added to that of the others; "just as you like; please yourselves and you please me. I only proposed what I thought most agreeable for us all;" but there was a touch of offence, of what is commonly termed "huffiness," in her manner as she said the words, which showed that her temper was one easily upset, and that her affirmation of the pleasure of her friends making her own was not entir[illegible]rue.

It [illegible] as well at this juncture to pause and answer the question which will naturally have risen in the minds of most readers of this story, "How was it that an open, honorable disposition, like that of Rachel Norreys could ever have found sufficient sympathy in that of Eliza Arundel to draw the two women so closely together in the bonds of friendship?" To those who have been thrown in military exile upon the companionship of a very few, the question scarcely needs a solution, and even to individuals who know nothing of such a life it is soon explainable. There are various forms of affection in this world, and one of the most common, and easiest mistaken for love, is that of attachment — such an attachment as subsisted, on one side at least, of this miscalled friendship. In a station like Gibraltar, where there are very few ladies, and very little in-door amusement, time passes heavily unless there are one or two houses, at which one is sufficiently intimate to run in and spend a few hours whenever one likes. And in the case of a girl like Rachel Norreys, without children or husband to occupy her time, and her father employed on his own duty most of the day, such a resource was almost essential. Circumstances had thus thrown her upon the society of Mrs. Arundel for the last three years, and the constant association and close intimacy which resulted from it had led her to believe that she loved the woman, and that the woman loved her. Added to which, Eliza Arundel had the subtilty of the serpent to enable her to maintain the credit of being harmless as the dove; and although Rachel was no simpleton to be easily hoodwinked, like all trusty people, she was slow to believe others untrustworthy. And the friend she had faith in was woman enough to know how far to raise her suspicions, and what salve to apply to the wound such raising might occasion. Amidst a large choice of acquaintance, Rachel's fancy would probably never have alighted upon Mrs. Arundel; but fate, solitude, and a heart ill at ease combined, had served to spread a net beneath her feet, which she, like many another of her sex before her, found it impossible to disentangle herself from, without rending it, and much of her life's happiness at the same time, to pieces.

But to return to the evening in question, an awkward silence followed for a time Mrs. Arundel's last words and look of offence; such a silence as must occasionally fall upon a small circle when private affairs are touched upon, and do not insure a general sympathy. Captain Craven tried to dis-[illegible] the present feeling by taking up Rachel's guitar.

Sing us something, Mrs. Norreys," he said, "if it will not be too much [illegible]ou."

Rachel's manner refuted the idea of anything being too much for her. She wished to make every one present forget that she had ever shed a tear; particularly she wished to forget herself the means by which Mrs. Arundel had endeavored to dry them. She took up her guitar, with an air of apparent pleasure in the anticipation of amusing them, and said she had no new songs, but Captain Craven was welcome to any of the old ones that he chose to name. He, of course, chose "any one Mrs. Norreys pleased," which was as good as saying, "none at all;" and then Mrs. Arundel put in her veto for "La Desolazione," a little melancholy thing by Giuseppe Lillo. It seemed hardly a friendly act to call for it, for there was a wild despairing tone breathed through the melody which, joined to the sad words, was not calculated to raise spirits already drooping. Rachel could not help thinking, as she heard the request, that Elise must remember that the very last time she had sung that song before her, she had been melted to tears at the sound of her own voice, and the thoughts which the melancholy words it uttered engendered. She gave one upward glance at the face of her friend, as much as to say, "Is this forgetfulness or malice?" and then blaming herself for the unkind suspicion, sat down to her task. It was a task; but she got through it bravely, and that over, the rest came easy, so she sang song after song as long as she was requested to do so. Hers was not a powerful voice nor an artistic touch, but they were true, clear notes that were very sweet to listen to, and she accompanied herself upon the guitar quite as well as any amateur ever does upon that instrument. The fact is, she was nearly self-taught. There was something in the wild sounds of the guitar, and the impassioned strains of Spanish love-songs which struck a chord in Rachel's nature, and assimilated with it. She sang all sorts of songs now: Moorish serenades, Norman [illegible] rcaroles, Spanish chants, and Portugese love-songs; melodies [illegible] of them, like herself, impassioned, wild, and flowing. As she sat this evening upon a low ottoman, her cheeks flushing and paling as her excitement rose and fell—her small hands in the prettiest of attitudes that pretty hands can assume—her flexible voice suiting itself so well to the character of each song she sang, she looked as though she ought never to be separated from her guitar, and probably few other situations would have offered so much display for the various changes which formed the characteristic feature of her mobile face. The evening was spent almost entirely in singing, for its unpleasant commencement seemed to have given a check to familiar conversation, and as eleven o'clock struck Rachel remembered that she had promised her father not to be at home very late.

"You are off terribly early to-night, carissima," exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, when the fact was announced; "but you mustn't go alone; Captain Craven will see you home, I am sure."

But there had been an expression in Eliza Arundel's face lately, and a tone in her voice, when speaking of Captain Craven and Rachel together, that made the latter shrink from the offer.

"It is out of Captain Craven's way," she answered; "and I thought Major Arundel———"

"I shall be only too proud," commenced poor old Jack, rising as he spoke.

"And so shall I," responded Cecil Craven, as he laughed and rose also.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, almost as if she was annoyed. "Why on earth should you go, Jack, when here is Captain Craven all ready, and you have had such a hard day's work! It *can* make no difference which goes. Now can it, Rachel? Don't ask Jack, my dearest girl, he is *so* tired."

"Not at all," commenced Major Arundel again, but Rachel interrupted him.

"I couldn't think of it," she said; "in fact, I don't want either of you. I can walk home perfectly well alone."

"*There's* a challenge to your gallantry, Captain Craven," exclaimed Eliza Arundel, as she turned to him.

"I am ready to accept it, as I said before," he answered, gaily. Mrs. Norreys *knows that I* would not allow her to return home by herself."

"*That's right:* of course not," was the reply; "so be off, both of

and mind you go straight home, and don't mistake your way," she added laughing, as she pretended to push them gently out into the verandah which surrounded the house.

"I cannot imagine, Eliza," said Major Arundel, in his measured tones when, having dismissed her friends with a loud "*Buona notte*," she returned to him in the drawing-room, "why, if, as you say, Craven is flirting with that girl, you should always appear so anxious to leave them together. It isn't as if she was single; I could understand it then; but as matters stand, I should have thought it much kinder in you, as a friend, to———"

He was proceeding in his slow, monotonous manner, to put forth his opinions, which were generally anything but foolish ones, when his wife stopped him with a contemptuous "Bah!" pronounced very short, and right in his face, as she stepped behind one of the curtains, and watched the pair in the verandah. They had stopped in order that Cecil Craven might relieve Rachel of her guitar, and as he slung it over one arm, he drew her hand through the other. "Tell me what worries you, Rachel," he said as he did so. They were innocent words enough, but he had said them a minute too soon. He had never called her anything but Mrs. Norreys in public before, and he mistook the surrounding stillness of the night for privacy. As he passed, with Rachel's arm through his own, out of the gloom of the verandah into the moonlit garden, the face which Mrs. Arundel returned from the curtain upon her husband was darker than it need have been, and it is shrewdly suspected that poor old Jack doubly earned his title before the next morning dawned upon Gibraltar.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW SHE BECAME MRS. NORREYS.

But Cecil Craven and Rachel Norreys had passed arm-in-arm from Mrs. Arundel's garden to the public road beyond without so much as a thought of the jealously and distrust which followed their exit. The way they had to traverse was a very short one: a couple of hundred yards or so down a steep path, cut in the side of the rock, would bring them to Dr. Browne's villa, and put an end to their communion. Perhaps they both remembered the brief distance with regret as they stepped into the moonlighted pathway, and saw all Gibraltar lying beneath them, wrapt in a grand silence. The whole station seemed asleep. The air was balmy, but cool, and the scent of a few night-flowers, too heavy by day, appeared refreshingly sweet now, in the absence of the sunshine. It was a night for a long walk, a night for unlimited confidences, a night for tears which had no sting in them; for kisses which were all truth—a night, in short, for love, and love alone. Cecil Craven appeared to feel the influence of the surrounding atmosphere, for as he found himself alone with Rachel Norreys, he repeated the question he had asked her beneath the verándah, and this time with increased emphasis, and an accent of greater entreaty. "What made you cry, Rachel? tell me all about it."

It was so good to feel the pressure of his strong arm as he spoke, and to know that he had said before he was ready to defend her, if need be, until death: it was so sweet, so new, to hear the interested voice in which he asked the question; to look up, and, by the moonlight, see his kind eyes bent upon her face as he waited for her answer; to feel that he was young like herself, and that he understood and sympathized with her. And so she told him all; the contents of her husband's letter to her father (her own she had not yet read); her dread of his arrival, of his taking her away from all she cared for; of her never, *never* being able to love him as a wife ought to do.

"For I have even forgotten his face," she wound up with; "it is like being married to a perfect stranger; and oh, Captain Craven, I am so *wretched when I think of it.*"

They had finished their short journey as she spoke, and entered Dr.

Browne's garden. Cecil Craven drew her under the shadow of the broad verandah, upon which her bed-room window looked, and stood against the open sill, lest their conversation should disturb her father, who slept on the opposite side of the house.

"Rachel," he said, as he held the girl before him, "each hour makes me reproach myself more that I ever made that fatal promise; but in trouble or difficulty of any kind, you know where your place ought to be."

"No, no!" she exclaimed, shrinking from him. "I have no right."

"No right!" he echoed; "no one has better; the right of justice and of love. Rachel, I will never take that plea from you; when you wish it, when you are ready, and the world's tussle is becoming too hard for you, remember that my home, wherever it may be, and my affections are open to you."

"Oh, that it might be!" she sighed.

"It is," he answered, emphatically; "and if you will not share the home I now inhabit, I will make one for you. I owe you so much, Rachel, if no more, for the wrong———"

"It is not yours," she interrupted, hastily; "you are not bound to pay off others' debts."

"Yes, I am, when it is my pleasure as well as duty. Only say, Rachel, that you will trust me; that you *do* trust me, and I will be contented."

"I do trust you, Captain Craven."

"Why 'Captain Craven?' Cannot you call me by name?"

"It seems so strange," she whispered.

"But you acknowledge my right to ask it?"

"Yes."

"Then say it, Rachel, and I shall better feel that you belong to me."

"Good-night, Cecil," and she gave him one of her hands as she said the words, and attempted to take her guitar from him with the other. But he held it behind his back.

"Not without a pledge of my right," he exclaimed, as he bent his face towards hers. But she started backwards, and colored violently.

"Oh, no," she said; "not that."

"Why not that, with the other?" he asked.

"Because the other is enough," she replied, but, recovering her composure, added archly, "for to-night."

"Then you shan't have your guitar," he rejoined.

"Then you may carry it home with you," she said, and entered the house, laughing as she spoke. And after a moment's pause, he put the instrument through the open window into the bed-room, and took his way again through the garden, whistling as he went.

She prepared to enter her room after this little passage of arms, almost gaily. She was too young and too imaginative to be left face to face with the anticipation of trouble long; a laugh, however slight, did her good, and acted like a cordial on her drooping spirits. A lamp was burning in her bedroom; and when she first entered the verandah she had glanced in to see that it was empty, and thought it was so. Now, however, she proved herself to have been mistaken; for as she turned the handle of the door, a tall, gaunt figure rose up from a chair which was concealed from the outside by the bed-furniture, and silently attended her pleasure. It was Caroline Wilson, the waiting-woman.

So unexpected, so unusual a sight, was this apparition, that Rachel almost exclaimed aloud as it first met her view. Then, as the individuality of the creation before her struck her senses, and the knowledge that the woman must have overheard all the bantering conversation which had taken place in the verandah, dawned upon her mind, her surprise turned to indignation, and that knew no bounds.

"What on earth are you doing here, Caroline?" she said, angrily; "who told you to sit up for me to-night?"

"No one, ma'am," was the mild reply; "but I thought I might be of service to you whilst undressing."

"When you know that I never require you, dressing or undressing, and have never let you touch me yet! I don't believe it. You have been employing your time opening the drawers and pulling about my things. I will

not have it, Caroline — I will stand it no longer. [illegible] given orders that my room is to be held private, and I will have no one sneaking about the house and acting as spy upon every occasion. You have guessed my mind upon the subject before this, and now you know it."

The servant had stood perfectly quiet during this harangue without moving so much as a muscle of her face. Now she stooped and picked up a handkerchief Rachel had let fall during her heated words, and returned it to her mistress with a half-curtsey before she made her respectful answer.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," she said, "that I should have been so unfortunate as to offend you by my over-desire to save you trouble. I had no intention of making you angry, nor had I received any direct orders this evening not to sit up for you. Your own bedroom was the most suitable place, I thought, for me to await your return; and if I had not fallen to sleep in my chair I should have risen to apprize you of my presence as soon as I heard your step in the garden. But if you really have so bad an opinion of me, ma'am, perhaps I had better leave your service; but on account of the little likelihood that there is of the poor doctor lasting much longer, I ———"

"There, there!" interrupted Rachel, "that will do; I don't need your services, and you can go to bed. When I *do* want you, you may be sure I shall always let you know."

What the woman had last said smote her bitterly. Every one seemed to add their confirmation to the dread she entertained of her father's approaching death. She had forgotten him — that dear sick father — when she had spoken so sharply to her waiting-woman. She had quite forgotten (how could she have done so?) that he had said only this evening that Caroline Wilson was necessary to his comfort. Go! of course she must not go, not if Rachel had to ask her herself to stay. And, after all, she may have been hasty; she had no proofs that the woman was doing anything but what she considered her duty, in sitting up for her mistress's return. Oh, she was hasty, a great deal too much so, her father had always said it; how sorry she felt when she thought of it, and yet she could not disconnect a dark and disagreeable doubt with Caroline Wilson's sinister eyes and unnaturally respectful demeanor; and with the doubt came back the remembrance that she must have overheard the conversation between Cecil Craven and herself in the verandah. She did not believe she had been asleep; she did not look the least as if she had; she must have overheard it, she was confident; and then Rachel fell to attempting to recall exactly what had been said, and to surmise what use this woman could make of her knowledge, if she was disposed to make any use of it at all.

As she sat before the looking-glass thinking, her eye fell upon the letter which she had received that afternoon and thrown aside unopened. It had been forwarded to Gibraltar under cover by her mother-in-law, to whose care it had been sent, and the address, written in a free manly hand, ran thus: —

"Mrs. Raymond Norreys
(Care of Mrs. Norreys),
Abbey Lodge,
Brompton,
England."

There was nothing to provoke any feeling but that of admiration in the writing, which, if one can judge character by such signs, betokened an offhand and decided one; yet the girl to whom it was addressed scarcely glanced at the superscription on the cover, but tore it open and dashed through its contents as if they were not worth time or consideration.

They were as follows: —

"*H. M. S. 'Agincourt,' Port Natal,*
"*March* 31*st*, 18—

"My dearest Rachel,

"We have been lying idle here for so many months, that I can scarcely believe that we have received our sailing-orders at last, and that by this *time to-morrow we shall* be on our way home; but it is really true, and as *we are all very busy in* consequence, I have only time to write a few lines,

that the good news may go to you by the next mail. When you receive this, I ought to be more than half way to you, and I hope it may find the 3rd in England again, and that the first face of welcome I see in Abbey Lodge may be that of my pretty Rachel; for though we have been separated for so many cruel years, I have never forgotten it, dearest, nor ceased to long for the moment when I shall see it again.

"Since we parted, I have often made myself wretched by the thought that had I only foreseen that five years would elapse before I could return to claim you for my wife, I never should have been guilty of the injustice of binding you to me by marriage; but since they are now so nearly over, I will try to think that 'all's well that ends well,' and to look forward to nothing but a long spell of happiness with my dear girl. And now, my darling, I have not a moment more to spare. I hope this will be the last letter I shall write to you for a long time to come, and that when we next find ourselves apart, I shall have a better right than I have now to sign myself

"Your devoted husband,

"RAYMOND NORREYS.

"P. S. I am bringing home such lots of pretty things for my dear wife from China and the Cape, and all manner of queer places."

But the promise of "lots of pretty things" did not seem to have the effect upon Rachel that it would have done upon most girls of her age. Indeed, it is doubtful if her eyes ever travelled as far as the postscript, so fixed were they upon the latter sentence and signature of her letter, her "devoted husband"—her husband—his wife. Although for five years she had known the fact, she had never seemed to grasp the meaning of the words until now. With it arose a sickly fear and dread—almost a great disgust. She sat for a few minutes motionless, looking at the reflection of her own face, from which all color had fled, in the glass, and at first it seemed possible to mould her future for herself, and with the thought her impulse was to tear her letter into a dozen pieces.

"His wife!" she exclaimed. "Never!—not for a thousand worlds! I will *not* be his wife—I will tell him so directly we meet. I will beg my bread first!—I will——"

But here a sense of the impotency of her rage, of the impossibility (however fine it sounded theoretically) of a woman born and brought up as a lady, begging her bread,—of the onus that would attach to her, bearing the name she did, if she refused to fulfil her duty—all broke upon the mind of the bewildered girl at once, and altered her demeanor. She rose from her chair half frightened at her discovery,—looked at her own reflection in the glass with eyes full of the deepest compassion—took one step forward, as if she were half blind—and then, gaining the bedside, sunk on her knees upon the floor and sobbed as if her heart would break. Ah! if Raymond Norreys could only have seen her then, he who, having reached England with a "fair wind and a flowing tide," was at that very moment impatiently awaiting the paying off of his ship at Spithead, anxious for nothing but liberty to rush to Gibraltar and fold the woman in his arms who was now by her actions silently cursing the destiny which had linked her fate with his. For it seemed, indeed, on looking backward, as if destiny had behaved worse than usual in linking these two so firmly together before they scarcely knew the nature of the obligations they took upon themselves. She had been extremely young at the time, as dates have already shown—only sixteen, and he, the husband, but five years older than herself. And it had happened on this wise:—

Dr. Browne had been stationed with his regiment at Portsmouth, and had placed Rachel at a finishing school at Southsea, that he might see his little girl as often as he felt inclined. A school, which was like too many others of the same class, where a few flimsy accomplishments were taken in at the cost of a large annual expenditure and the natural modesty of the pupils; for no one who has not searched into the subject, and paid it great personal attention, can have any conception of the folly, the indelicacy, and the wrong which go on among a number of young people brought together *from mixed society and homes*, and left, during the hours not devoted *study, to amuse themselves.*

The finishing establishment to which Rachel Norreys was consigned was no better than the generality of such. Dr. Browne loved the girl devotedly; but he was not keen-sighted enough to espy the evils to which she would be subjected—nor, indeed, are nine parents out of ten. The convenience of the arrangement is all that they think of; and the topics to which I allude are not precisely such as a young girl chooses to confide to her mother or father. So Rachel received instruction from various masters in drawing, dancing and music; attended classes for French, German and Italian; and spent six hours at least out of the twelve in discussing lovers, elopements and marriage, with the young ladies of the school. Not that I mean to intimate that my heroine became immodest under the process; she only experienced what almost every school-girl is subjected to, that is to say, she had her eyes opened long before the world and her senses would have opened them for her. And the consequence of such violence is, that the next necessity for young ladies, after talking of lovers, is to possess lovers themselves; and Rachel Browne was about the only girl in the school so unprovided when Raymond Norreys became aquainted with her, and it must be said, for his age, laid very spirited siege to the citadel of her heart.

The lad—at this time a promising youth, nothing more—was known to Dr. Browne, and had often met Rachel at his house on a Saturday afternoon—the good doctor little suspecting that the flirtation he saw them carry on was anything but a boy's and girl's nonsense.

He had been acquainted with the parents of Raymond Norreys, and liked the young fellow for the sake of his father, who was dead, and whom he greatly resembled. Raymond, who had entered the Royal Navy at his own request, and who had already made one cruise, was passing the interval of his being appointed to another ship in studying navigation in one of the training-vessels in Portsmouth harbor. But much of his time was spent on shore, and much in loitering about Dr. Browne's house; yet, until one bright morning in July, the doctor had had no idea that Raymond Norreys' love for his daughter was likely to prove a serious affair. But on that morning the proprietress of the establishment at which Rachel was imbibing so many foolish and wrong ideas, drove up to Dr. Browne's house, accompanied by her sister, a couple of teachers, and an unlimited supply of pocket-hadkerchiefs and smelling-salts, and burst in upon him with the awful intelligence that his daughter was "missing" from her house that morning, and that no one knew where she had gone; but that some of her companions, frightened at her temerity at really carrying out what she had threatened to do, had confessed that they had heard her say she was going to have a runaway marriage with Mr. Raymond Norreys.

It is impossible and unnecessary to describe the scene which followed such a disclosure. Dr. Browne was a man of action. It was not then ten o'clock; he knew the only thing to be done was to follow the fugitives, so he only allowed himself time to consign the fainting lady proprietress to an unmentionable place to her face, which so surprised her that she quite recovered from the swoon she was just about to indulge in, before he rushed frantically from the house and was at the railway station making inquiries on all sides. Here his task became easy. The young lady and gentleman had been observed by several of the officials; their destination, some fifty miles off, was known; and all poor Dr. Browne had to do was to sit down and wait for the next train.

When it started it conveyed him, in less than three hours after he had first heard the news, to a small country place, with only one church in it and one inn. He went to the latter first, and found the newly-married couple sitting very close together on a sofa waiting the appearance of the dinner they had ordered. The meeting was not a very formidable one. Dr. Browne had only to open the inn-parlor door, and to show his kind, sad face inside it, when there was a cry almost of joy, a bound forward, and a slight figure was folded in his arms, saying, "Oh, papa, I am so sorry! I will never do it again! Oh, papa, darling, do forgive me!"—and the tacit forgiveness came almost as she spoke in a shower of kisses from the dear lips above her hidden face. But it was to the young husband that the father refused to hold out a hand, or to speak, except in tones of greatest severity.

"Do you know what you have done, sir, in sneaking in this manner into an honorable man's house, and stealing the best thing he had there? Are you aware that you have sullied this child's name in a manner that years may not wipe out?"

But the lad would not be cowed: he looked infinitely proud as he replied,—

"I am not aware how I can sully the name of Browne by exchanging it for that of Norreys, sir—though I acknowledge I have been very wrong in persuading Rachel to this step. Yet she is my wife now—and no woman need be ashamed of being so."

God bless the boy! He might have been fifty, and a duke into the bargain, to see the flashing of his eager eyes as the words passed his lips.

Dr. Browne's heart relented towards him as he watched his manly bearing, but he would not show it.

"Your wife!" he repeated. "Do you know, Mr. Norreys, that my daughter is under age, and, having been married without the consent of parents or guardians, can have her marriage put aside, if I choose to do so."

Raymond grew pale, and took a step forward.

"But you will not choose it, sir: you will not have it annulled. I am of age, Dr. Browne. I will guard her faithfully if you will trust her to me."

"And why couldn't you have come to me like an honest lad, and told me so to my face, instead of persuading this child to outrage every law of obedience and decency, and to run away from a father who never said *no!* to her slightest wish, as if he was a tyrant——." But here he was interrupted by Rachel's sobs as she clasped him tighter round the neck.

"Don't, papa; don't say that! I will go back with you, papa. I will live at home with you for ever; only don't say words like those."

Dr. Browne replied, tenderly, "Will you go back with me, Rachel?—will you give up this boy for your old father again?"

"Yes, I will—I will?" she exclaimed, convulsively, as she clung to him the tighter.

"And you, young gentleman—will you consent to this folly being as if it had never been, and let this girl return quietly home with me?"

"Never!" exclaimed Raymond Norreys. "She has told me that she loves me; she has become my wife of her own free will. I never give her up with mine."

Dr. Browne admired the spirit which dictated the words, though he professed to resent it.

"Then I shall apply to the law," he answered, "to restore my daughter to me."

"Rachel: you will not leave me," said the young man, as he tried to approach the girl, and to take her hand. The tones of her lover's voice roused her, and she attempted an appeal to her father. Energetic at sixteen as she was at one-and-twenty, she spoke and felt like a woman instead of a child.

"Papa, I love him: we have been very foolish and wicked—but I thought it such a fine thing to be married; and we knew you would never consent whilst I was so young. But don't separate us, papa; he is going away soon on a long voyage. Let me be his wife, and I will live at home with you, and still be your little daughter for all the years that he will be away."

Dr. Browne felt that they both waited for his fiat. They had been foolish, but they were children, and foolishness was bound up in their hearts; besides, he had never refused Rachel anything: yet he dared not decide by himself. He put his girl upon the sofa with a sigh, and told Raymond Norreys that he wished to speak to him alone. As they left the inn together, he said: "Raymond, before I give you a definite answer, I must have counsel upon this subject. Rachel has other friends besides myself, and I should wish to have the advice of her family before I decide. Perhaps you also had better communicate with your mother, Raymond."

"Thank you; I am of age," was the only reply.

"Anyway, I should prefer your giving me your company until this matter is settled."

The young man's pride was touched at this request; but he remembered what might be the consequences if he objected to it, and therefore prev

to walk by Dr. Browne's side to the station. There they spent a miserable couple of hours together, whilst messages to parties unknown went fluttering up and down the telegraphic wires, and Dr. Browne watched their departure and awaited their advent always in the same position, with his face buried in his hands and in total silence. At length the message had been received, and the elder gentleman intimated his intention of returning to the inn. When there, he took his daughter into the shelter of his embrace, and thus addressed her lover:—

"Raymond Norreys, my daughter [illegible] perfectly [illegible] side with me in the justice of the offer I am about to make you. You have tried to take her from us by stealth, but you have failed. Yet, in consideration of your youth, and the family from which you spring" (for the lad [illegible] rate stock), "we are disposed to overlook the offence on [illegible] — that you permit Rachel to return home quietly with me; that you join [illegible] ship to which you are appointed with all speed, and do not attempt [illegible] her as your wife until you return from this cruise."

"Not for a few weeks, sir!" exclaimed Raymond, his color going and coming as he spoke. May I not have my wife until I start? It is rather hard———"

"Rather hard!" interrupted the doctor; "when I have the power to take her from you altogether. What do you mean?"

"I suppose I must submit," the boy rejoined; "but I love her, and it *is* hard. Rachel, darling, you won't forget that you are my wife, although they tear you from me."

She turned as he spoke and rushed into his arms, and as he showered his young hot kisses upon her face and hands, Dr. Browne wished to heaven that he could feel it right to give them to one another. But his love for Rachel was great, and he remained firm.

"Now, Norreys," said he, "be a man, and let her go. You shall see her as often as you choose until you sail, and you'll be back again to claim her before you have a proper beard upon your chin."

Sorry comfort! but they had to accept it. The boy gave her up; and until he sailed for China and the Archipelago, a month afterwards, he never saw his wife except in her father's presence. Then she was sent to a school in London, where she was known only by her maiden name; and it was not until the 3rd Royal Bays were under orders for Gibraltar that Dr. Browne had her home, and introduced her to his regiment as Mrs. Norreys. She was then only a girl of eighteen, and yet the image of her young husband was already beginning to fade in her memory. The fact is, she had never loved him as he loved her. She had, as she told her father, "thought it fine to be married;"—something to crow about over the school-girls of her acquaintance; and as she crept upwards to woman's estate the truth sorrowfully dawned upon her that she had made a great mistake. And it was an aggravation to the misery of her discovery (as every woman will acknowledge) to feel that Raymond still [illegible] and fully expected that she loved him in return. And this was what [illegible] rushing through her mind as she knelt sobbing by the bedside on the [illegible] ing that we left her.

CHAPTER V.

A SPY IN THE CAMP.

It was some time before Rachel rose from that self-abased attitude, and prepared to seek her bed: she had too much to think about, too much to weep over to allow the tempest of her grief to expend itself quickly. When at length it was exhausted, and she tried to compose herself to sleep, her eyelids were hot and swollen, and her whole body feverish, so that the night was well advanced before she succeeded in attaining her object; and when she did sleep, it was heavily; and although she was half conscious several times during the early morning of a footstep moving about her room, she

never roused herself entirely until the sun was shining brightly into the half-closed Venetian shutters of her window, and so fervently as to warn her at once that, whatever the hour, it was late compared to her usual time of rising.

But still she lay, for a few minutes, unwilling to move. Her eyelids felt stiff, and there was a languor pervading her whole frame which made her search for the cause. Then the remembrance of her last night's trouble, of her husband's return, and her father's illness, all flashed upon her, and with it came entire wakefulness.—She rose quickly, threw on her dressing-gown, with the intention of going to Dr. Browne's room, as it was her custom to do directly she waked, to learn what kind of a night he had passed. But as she prepared to cross the drawing-room she heard voices on the opposite side of the house, and paused. The villa which Dr. Browne occupied was built very similar to most houses in warm climates. It consisted of some five or six rooms, all large and airy, but built on the same floor, and opening one into the other, by means of more doors and windows than we in England could conceive it possible to live amongst. Of these apartments the two centre ones were the drawing and dining rooms, and the bedrooms were at the sides. All round the house there ran a broad verandah, sheltering the windows of the various rooms, without which they would have been insupportable in the hottest part of the day, even without the aid of their green jalousies. The window-sills were very low, and the large windows usually stood wide open, even at night, so that the verandah itself, with its pleasant screen of over-hanging creepers, and its array of little tables and lounging chairs, seemed almost like part of the rooms which opened upon it. But to gain access to the side of the villa which Dr. Browne, with his attendants, occupied, Rachel must cross the drawing-room; and there were other voices to be heard beside those of her father and Caroline Wilson; and she was in her dressing-gown, so she stopped to listen. Soon she distinguished the tones of Dr. Harris, the other regimental surgeon, and that of some one else blended with it, and they alarmed her. Why was Dr. Harris there so early? He was used to call about twelve every morning, but it could not be that time yet. Her watch lay on the toilet-table, but in her distress of the previous night she had forgotten to wind it up, and it was useless. She rang a hand-bell which stood there, violently, and it brought Caroline Wilson to her side; her apparently imperturbable features bearing no trace that she had any remembrance of the words with which her mistress had separated from her the evening before.

"Caroline," said Rachel, anxiously; "who is in papa's room? Is anything the matter?"

"Only Dr. Harris, ma'am, and Capt. Craven. The Doctor passed rather a restless night, and so Barnes and I thought it advisable for Dr. Harris to see him earlier than usual this morning."

"What o'clock is it?"

"Just gone ten, ma'am. Will you please to have your breakfast in here? You've had a long sleep, ma'am; and yet you weren't to stay up late last night."

Rachel appeared to take no notice of the interest expressed in the foregoing words, but followed up her former question with another.

"What does Dr. Harris say about papa, Caroline?"

"I have not heard the doctor make any remarks, ma'am, at least not to me. He told Barnes that master must have plenty of stimulants."

"Why did Captain Craven come with Dr. Harris?"

The woman's lips pursed together in a moment.

"That I am sure I cannot venture to say, ma'am. I can't account for any of Captain Craven's movements, his comings or his goings; he walked in at the same time as Dr. Harris did."

Rachel was vexed with herself for having asked the question.

"I must see Dr. Harris," she continued. "Ask him, Caroline, before he goes, to step in here to speak to me."

"Yes, ma'am. Won't you let me bring you some breakfast into your room?"

"A cup of coffee—nothing more: I couldn't eat." And then her servant took her departure, and the girl was left alone to spend the moment

in suspense until Dr. Harris should make his appearance, and one way or another set her doubts at rest, for she was determined she must know the truth; she could not fight any longer against the sickly doubt and dread which assailed her every time her father spoke of himself, or others spoke of him. And so she arranged her habiliments a little more carefully, and set her room in order, and tried to beguile the time until the door of her father's bedroom should unclose again. It seemed a long time first, but at last the welcome sound was audible. She heard the door open, and the gentleman come out, and when they had advanced into the drawing-room, they were evidently stopped by the voice of Caroline Wilson, which said:

"May I ask how you find my poor master to-day, sir?"

The answer was given in so low a tone that the eager listener could not catch the words.

"Miss Rachel wants to speak to you, sir, before you go; she is still in her bedroom. That way, if you please."

As the steady tread of Dr. Harris approached her door, she knew it would soon be over. Dr. Harris was a younger man than Dr. Browne, but considered much higher in his profession. He was very skilled and very kind, and Rachel had perfect faith in him. So that when she caught sight of the sorrowfully grave expression of his face, and felt the sympathetic pressure of his hand, as he took his seat beside her on the sofa, she guessed what the answer to her question would be, and her hands went up immediately to shut out the light of day from her face. There was no need for Dr. Harris to ask why she wished to see him, he knew it as soon as he saw the inquiring glance in the eyes with which she turned to greet him; he did not even profess to do so; to gain time for his sad news he only said—

"Try not to grieve about it, Mrs. Norreys, more than you can help. You have others to think of as well as yourself."

"Oh, Dr. Harris! is it really, really true, then? Is he so very ill as he said himself he was?"

Dr. Harris knew the character he had to deal with: he felt this was no weak foolish creature who would swallow a compassionate lie until the last, and consent to be deceived till death was actually in the house. And if she had been one on whom it was easy to practise deception, Rachel Norreys' disposition was not of that order to bear the shock of a sudden grief with impunity to itself. Her nerves were too finely strung to bear a great wrench; she was not a woman to sit down patiently with sorrow and look it in the face, and so Dr. Harris knew that for physical as well as other reasons, it was best she should be told at once the worse that was in store for her.

"He is *very ill*," was therefore the only reply he made to her question.

"Dr. Harris, is he dying? tell me the truth; I can bear anything sooner than this suspense, only tell me the truth quickly, and put me out of my pain."

"I *will* tell you, Mrs. Norreys, because I know you have a brave heart and can bear anything that Heaven sends you: I deeply grieve to say it, but it is only too true—your father is dying. I did not lose hope myself until this morning, but so rapid a change has taken place during the night that I must not deceive myself or you any more. He cannot last much longer now."

Rachel was looking at him as if she waited for the fiat of her own life or death from his lips. Hers were parted with suspense, and her face, swollen and haggard from the indulgence of her tears the night before, seemed to have lost all trace of its usual vivacity or youth.

"How long?" she gasped, rather than said.

"Two or three days," was the compassionate answer, "not more, Mrs. Norreys, perhaps not so much. Now cry, there's a dear girl, and it will do you good."

"Please leave me," she said, faintly; "I am very much obliged to you. I thank you very much, but I must be alone or this will kill me."

Her tones were too earnest, too real to be disregarded, and simply pressing the hand he held before releasing it, Dr. Harris rose without further comment, and left the room. As he passed into the verandah, Captain Craven started up from a chair upon which he had been lounging.

"Have you told her?" he inquired, anxiously

"Yes," was the whispered reply.

"And how does she bear it?"

"Just as you might imagine such a deep-feeling heart would bear it—without a word. I'd almost as soon have had the task of putting a knife to her throat. God help her, poor child!"

"Are you going home now, Harris?"

"Yes, I can be of no use here. I shall be back in a couple of hours. Where are you bound to?"

"I shall stay here for a little while," said Cecil Craven, reseating himself; "I don't feel as if I could leave the house just yet."

"All right, good-bye;" and then he was left alone to grieve for the young heart grieving within. And she *was* grieving: she sat like a statue of stone; not even the knowledge that her father's life was fast slipping away, and that soon she should no longer have the power of seeking his presence, could enable her to shake off the torpor which had crept over her at the confirmation of the news which she had dreaded. Dead—in two or three days at furthest—her father—her loving, indulgent, gentle father—dead!

At the thought of his gentleness, his patience, his child-like gratitude for simple offices done for him during his illness, the tears which had refused to rise at the vision of her own despair, commenced to trickle down Rachel's cheeks—to fill her heavy swollen eyes again, making the feverish eyelids smart as they ran over them, to trickle slowly down the stained cheeks and to rest about the fallen mouth without so much as a hand raised to wipe them away. Caroline Wilson entered at this time with the ordered coffee, and seemed about to speak, but the look on her mistress' face stopped even her tongue, and she left the room again without a word. But her appearance roused another train of thought in Rachel's bosom, and self-reproach began to take the upper hand, as she wondered how she could ever have wasted a thought upon such folly as a servant's shortcomings, when this great grief (before which even that of her husband's return paled) was marching down upon her—this grief, so vast, so awful, so immeasurably sharp. With the thought her stony stage was conquered. An echo of the fervent wish Dr. Harris had expressed for her, a great cry of "God help me!" from her lips, and then the tears came down like rain, and the shock had lost its first power. The exclamation reached the ears of Cecil Craven in the verandah; he had been listening anxiously for some token of distress before that, and he hailed the sound almost with pleasure. For though he could not understand the feverish excitability of Rachel's character, he could sympathize in it because it was hers, and Dr. Harris's word respecting her silent reception of his news had frightened him. But with the knowledge of her distress, a strong wish came on him to attempt her consolation; and so he crept closer to the closed Venetian shutters of her room, and peeped through them, calling softly,

"Rachel! dear Rachel! I am here."

She raised her head from the sofa-cushion as she heard his words, and through all her trouble felt thankful for the unexpected sympathy.

"Oh, Cecil!" she exclaimed, "it will kill me!"

Her voluntary mention of his Christian name encouraged him so far that he pushed the blind to one side, and thrust his head into full view.

"I am so very sorry for you, Rachel!"

"I am sure you are," was her reply, "and it is so comforting to feel you are. God bless you for it!"

This was still more encouraging; consequently, Captain Craven, who never needed much encouragement to do anything where a pretty woman was concerned, entered Rachel's bedroom. At another time she would certainly have remonstrated with him on his forwardness, but this seemed no moment for an exhibition of prudery. She did put in a faint protest that he ought not to have come there, but before the words were well out of her mouth, her head was again buried in the cushion, and he was on the sofa beside her trying to get possession of her hand, and begging her, by everything he could think of, not to make him so miserable by the exhibition of her tears. He looked very handsome and affectionate as he pleaded to

and although his arguments did not possess much sense they sounded very comfortable to listen to. He was dressed in plain clothes, an indulgence not always obtainable in foreign stations; but beneath the loose, light material that his morning coat was composed of, an observer might have seen that he wore no waistcoat, and that a set of rather remarkable-looking gold studs, with his initials in a monogram engraved upon each, and a blue silk handkerchief knotted carelessly about his throat, were all the ornaments that his attire could boast of. His face was flushed, and his voice, when he spoke to Rachel, was very low and sympathetic. Commonplace words of comfort at such a moment would only have worried and annoyed her; but the continued entreaty that she would try to compose herself for *his* sake; that she would remember that she could not be unhappy without making *him* so also, bore with them such a pleasing conviction that she had here a friend—that she was not to be really left all alone—that, however much she grieved, she could not be entirely solitary in her sorrow, whilst such words lasted and were true—that her sobs gradually grew less and less, her tears dried, and she sat upright upon the sofa and ceased to catch her breath with every word she uttered.

"That's a dear girl," exclaimed Cecil Craven, with evident satisfaction, as he viewed the effect of his consolation; "now you will be good won't you, and not cry again?"

"No, I shall not cry again," she replied, sadly. "I have cried myself out."

The young voice was so mournful; the young face looked so weary, that Captain Craven, yielding to a very natural impulse, bent his lips to hers and kissed her. She started and colored, but did not make the objection to such a proceeding that she had the night before. On the contrary, she said, with an intonation of grateful feeling,—"Thank you, dear Cecil; I know you feel for me."

He was lounging over the sofa beside her, as she spoke, and at the same moment the bedroom door apppeared to close very softly, as if the sea-breeze had gently blown it to.

Rachel raised her head to listen, like a graceful deer who is startled by the rustling of falling leaves.

"Did any one open the door?" she asked.

"Not that I know of," replied Captain Craven; "at least I didn't hear any one do so. I think it must have been the wind."

But she was not satisfied, and her color rose. "I think you had better go, Cecil," she said; "I shouldn't like any one to see you here. I ought not to have let you come in; but you have been such a comfort to me!"

"Let me stay, then," he pleaded.

"No, no! you must go now," was the answer. "See, I am not even dressed," she added, blushing, "and *he* may want me at any moment. Go, and come again to me this evening."

He could not refuse to comply with her request, and as he stood up, she said:

"You have dropped one of your studs; you had better look for it."

"Oh, yes, said he," observing the loss. "I shouldn't like to spoil this set; it was my mother's present. It must be on the sofa; perhaps you are sitting on it Rachel."

She rose, and they searched for the missing stud, but could not see it anywhere.

"It may have rolled under the bed," he suggested, and prepared to ascertain if his suggestion was correct.

But Rachel heard the sound of footsteps coming across the sitting-room.

"Oh, do go, Cecil," she exclaimed; "never mind the stud now, I will look for it afterwards; there is somebody coming."

"One minute," he urged, commencing to search—

"No, not an instant," she rejoined, in terror, "pray go at once."

The loss of a thousand studs would not have kept him then, for he saw she was really alarmed; so he leaped through the open window, and not too soon, for the next moment a soft tap was heard at the door, and Caroline Wilson entered the room.

'An orderly has come from Mrs. Arundel, if you please, ma'am, or

wishes to know if you are going over there this morning, and your papa has asked for you several times since Dr. Harris went."

Rachel prepared to pass through the open door at once.

"Tell the orderly to wait," she said; "I shall be back directly, and will write a note," and with that she was gone, and in her father's room.

Mrs. Wilson having delivered the message to Mrs. Arundel's messenger through the open window, commenced to employ the interval of her mistress's absence by setting her bedroom in order. The first object her eye lit upon was the guitar.

"Ah, that has been returned, has it? well, he didn't bring it with him this morning any way, for I saw him come up the garden with Dr. Harris; there's more a going on at times than one thinks for, I fancy, in this house." Having taken up the instrument and set it against another part of the wall, with a vicious thump which can scarcely have been calculated to improve its tone, she next proceeded to strip the bed, at the foot of which the sofa stood, and in the act, some of the bedclothes trailing upon the floor, Mrs. Wilson stooped to re-arrange them. Whilst so doing she appeared to have found some object of interest, for when she resumed her original posture, it was with a look of undisguised triumph on her face and something small in her hand, which, having first well examined, she was very particular in wrapping in paper before she stowed it away in her pocket. In looking about for a piece with which to accomplish her object, she saw the torn sheets of Raymond Norreys' letter, which had been rent in four or five places, crumpled and cast on one side. Caroline Wilson picked up one of the pieces, and smoothed out its creases. It happened to be the ending of the letter: —

"I shall write to you
"and that when we next
"ourselves apart, I shall have
"right than I have now to sign myself
"Your devoted husband,
"RAYMOND NORREYS."

She had to read the words over several times before she could quite arrive at their meaning, for she was not a well-educated woman; but it was not the first attempt that she had made to master the same handwriting, and, therefore, she soon arrived at the truth.

"This is what we do with our husband's letters, is it?" she said to herself. "This is how we value them? Well, I don't think if I had looked all day I could have found a better piece of paper to wrap my findings in. The two together, small though they be, may turn up yet, when they are least expected to do so. If I'm not mistaken, Mrs. Norreys will be sorry some of these fine days that she hasn't treated me with greater civility; till then I don't lose sight of my little perquisite," and she put the paper and its enclosure safely away as she mused. But her mental soliloquy was here interrupted by the re-entrance of her mistress, with a flushed face, but no further signs of emotion than when she had left the room. She had not touched on the subject of his approaching death with her father, for Dr. Harris had told her not to do so. The dying man was fully aware that he was dying; he had said so again and again for weeks past, but his strength was nearly all gone, and it was not thought advisable, since he had never directly put the question, to tell him that his end was so near at hand. So, besides a gentle reproof for her red eyes, no allusion had been made to the impending trouble, for which Rachel had been thankful, for she did not feel as if she could have borne any more violent emotion that morning. She was thoroughly exhausted and worn out by the strength of her own feelings. But she was annoyed on her return to find that Mrs. Wilson had thought proper to commence making her bed and setting her room in order.

"You knew I had not dressed or washed," she said, but not so sharply as she usually spoke to the individual in question. "You might have waited for my orders. You had better go to papa now, in case he wants you, and leave the room until I am out of it."

"Major Arundel's orderly is still waiting for your answer, ma'am," with a mild expostulation.

"Oh, bother it!" exclaimed Rachel, with more impatience than elegance; "bring me my desk then." When it came, she hardly knew, on so little consideration, what to say. She wrote one note, and then tore it up. The fact is, she was not positive as to her interview with Cecil Craven having been quite a private one, and she was diffident of not mentioning it to Mrs. Arundel, for fear the story might be repeated, and her silence on the subject make it appear more than it really was. She was already beginning (almost unconsciously to herself) to feel a little afraid of entirely trusting her bosom friend's good-nature where Captain Craven was concerned. And so her second note spoke openly of the occurrence.

From Mrs. Norreys to Mrs. Arundel:

"DEAREST ELISE,

"I cannot go to see you this morning, or to-morrow, or perhaps not at all for some days. I dare say you have seen Dr. Harris by this time, and know all my misery. I feel I can never leave him again for the little while I shall have him with me. I even grudge the few minutes which this note takes me to write.

"Have you seen Captain Craven yet? He was so very kind and good to me this morning, and I scarcely know what I should have done without the comfort he gave me, for poor papa does not yet know Dr. Harris' opinion of his case, so I have to grieve alone. C. C. was naughty enough though to jump in at my bedroom window to talk to me, which he mustn't do again, but I was too unhappy to scold him. If you are near our house to-day, come in, dear Elise, and see your affectionate

"RACHEL."

It was not long before the orderly brought back an answer to her note.

From Mrs. Arundel to Mrs. Norreys:

"CARISSIMA MIA,

"Jack saw Harris at orderly hour this morning, and heard the sad news. How my heart bleeds for you, my dearest girl! But you are a naughty little puss to run to Master Cecil Craven for consolation. I have no doubt he was an *immense comfort* to you, and that he found a certain lady's bedroom a very pleasant billet; but that's a sort of game which you mustn't play at too often, Miss Rachel, or you'll find it dangerous. I shouldn't be at all surprised myself if Master C. C. presents himself at the window tomorrow morning again, armed with a fresh stock of consolation. You sly puss! I shall run in and see you, I dare say, this evening. Adio belissima. Keep up your spirits.

"Ever your loving

"ELISE."

"Oh, how can Elise write such nonsense at such a time!" sighed poor Rachel, as she tore the effusion of her bosom friend in half, and threw it away. She felt that Mrs. Arundel's words were an insult to her present feelings; she wished she had never been so silly as to tell her anything about Cecil Craven. She might have guessed that she would not be able to enter into her view of the subject. She felt angry and sore that a joke could be made out of anything at such a miserable epoch of her existence, and, for the first time, almost hoped that her bosom friend would forget her promise, and not come to see her that evening. She tore up the note and threw it away; but why did she leave it on the floor? In her heedless impetuosity, Rachel Norreys had no forethought in little things; in another moment she had completed her dressing, and proceeded to join her father. The remembrance of her friend's words gave her annoyance. Whilst in her bedroom she had looked everywhere for Cecil Craven's stud, but without success. That was another subject for worry; she was afraid that Caroline Wilson, notwithstanding her own careful search, might find it in some unexpected corner, and recognize the owner. But neither of these little troubles occupied her much. How could they whilst she sat, as she did all day, by her father's side, and remembered, as she listened to his voice, how soon it would be hushed forever? She would have thought about them both a little more, perhaps, could she have seen the look malice on the face of the waiting-woman, whose capability of revenge

had laughed at and denied, only the day before, as she picked up the severed halves of Mrs. Arundel's foolish note whilst she was finishing the arrangement of her mistress's bedroom, and having read them, put them away safely in company with Cecil Craven's missing stud, and a look in her own eyes which betokened danger.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ARRIVAL AT ABBEY LODGE.

Scattered here and there about Old Brompton, may still be seen some few houses whose foundation stones were laid when all that surrounded them was fair, open, smiling country.

Abbey Lodge, the residence of Raymond Norreys' mother, was one of these. In it had she and her husband lived all the years of their married life, as his father and mother had done before him, and his grandfather and grandmother before that. Abbey Lodge was unaltered, from the day that her husband had brought her there as a bride, excepting that thirty years had heightened its solid beauties by increasing their age.

With a snug brougham, and horses in the stable, which was adjacent, though quite detached from the dwelling-house, one man-servant only indoors (the rest of their establishment consisting of maids), Mrs. Norreys and her daughter had lived a quiet but very comfortable existence during the period of the son and brother's absence at sea. It had been a great trial for the mother to part with her only boy for such an uncertain profession as the navy; but it had been his father's before him, and he was bent upon it, so that she had tried not to regret it, until the imprudent marriage occurred, which had seemed to divide them more than the sea could ever do, and which, she could not help believing still, would never have taken place had they not been separated so early. Raymond's grandfather and great-grandfather had both been merchants in the city, which accounted for the liberal income which Mrs. Norreys now enjoyed; and some of their family had chosen to look down upon them for the same, and to have a sneer at trade whenever they chanced to meet them; and Raymond's father was proud and foolish enough to feel the empty taunt, and to refuse, in consequence, to follow the same pursuit. He had not been too proud to use the money earned by trade, however; but he declined to make any more, and entered the Royal Navy as soon as he was eligible for it. And Raymond had inherited his father's ideas and followed his father's example; there was a baronetcy in the Norreys family, and the branch of it who laughed at the city merchants was no less than the branch appertaining to Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise, in the county of Berkshire. At the present time, the reigning power was Sir Archibald — a contemporary of Raymond's father, but as unknown to him as Raymond was to Sir Archibald's son and heir, who was reported to be a fine, handsome young man. He was the only heir to the title and estate, before Raymond Norreys himself; it would be folly to deny that Raymond Norreys had never thought upon such a contingency as his eventually becoming a baronet, he certainly had not calculated upon its ever being his luck to step into the family title, for his father had ever discountenanced such imaginings, and the gap between the elder and younger branches of the family had widened and widened, until they appeared to be no longer of the same blood. Sir Archibald scarcely knew that such a young fellow as Raymond Norreys was in existence, whilst to the descendants of the merchant the acres of Woolcombe Rise were unknown grounds. They never heard anything about their grand relations, except through the medium of the newspapers; and had, indeed, almost forgotten that their family consisted of other than themselves and their immediate kith and kin.

It was at the close of a long hot day in the middle of June, when the evening shadows had fallen so considerably as to make a couple of figure

pacing up and down beneath the shade of the trees in the Abbey Lod garden, appear indistinctly grey, that Mrs. Norreys, alarmed for l daughter's delicate health and aptitude for catching cold, ventured to c her into the house.

"Christine, my dear, it is past nine o'clock, and the evening is ve chilly. Pray do not stay out any longer, or else let me send you a sha to put on!"

"No, never mind, mamma, dear, we will come in at once."

"No—send for the shawl," urged her companion, "it is quite wa yet."

"I don't myself think there is much danger of catching cold to-nigh replied Christine, laughing; "but I would rather go in, because mam will be anxious, whether I am wrapped up or not. Come, Alick."

She ran across the lawn as she spoke, and her companion followed h though slowly. When she stepped into the lighted hall, and laid her l on one side, she appeared simply a nice-looking girl of two-and-twen with dark eyes and hair and a fresh complexion, but there was an appe ance of *bonhomie* about her features that was very grateful to turn to.

As Christine passed into the dining-room, which they used of an eveni when they were alone, and sitting down upon a low stool by her mothe side, twined her arms fondly about her, it was evident there was a gr deal of love and confidence between these two, as there always should between mother and daughter; and Mrs. Norreys, sitting in the pla lamplight, looked just such a mother as a daughter should ever have turn to. She was a woman of fifty, her hair was grey, still she retain the complexion of a girl, and her quiet eyes seemed as though they nev could have flashed with anger, or expressed any feeling antagonistic the dictates of a pure and gentle heart.

"Where is Alick?" she asked, as Christine settled herself besi her.

"Outside, I suppose," was the reply; "he followed me, I belie Alick!"

"Well," said rather a sulky voice from the hall door steps.

"Where are you? Why don't you come in-doors?"

"Thank you, I prefer being where I am."

"What is the matter, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Norreys, of h daughter.

Christine shrugged her shoulders: "I don't know; something has p him out again, I suppose."

Mrs. Norreys sighed, and was silent.

The fact is, Mr. Alick Macpherson stood in too important a position the household for his little tempers (which occurred rather oftener th was pleasant) to be witnessed with indifference. For he was supposed be engaged to marry Christine Norreys, although, from his own want means (he held some appointment in the War Office), it was improbal that the marriage would take place for some time. Yet Christine lov him, and was ready to humor this worst phase of his character, never c sidering in what, if not checked, it might end.

She was on the doorstep before another five minutes had elapsed, try to coax him to do what ought to have been his pleasure.

"Come, dear Alick," she said, "don't sit on those cold stones; I am s you cannot be comfortable. Come in-doors, and I'll play to you."

But Mr. Macpherson neither moved nor spoke.

"What is it, dearest?" she said, as she bent down, and laid her ch against the top of his head, "is it anything *I've* done?"

At first he insisted in asserting that it was "nothing;" but when had coaxed it out of him, it appeared that his royal highness had ta offence because she preferred complying with her mother's request, coming in, to running the risk of taking cold by staying out to make l to him under the mulberry and walnut trees.

"Oh, what a naughty boy!" cried Christine, when she had extrac this confession from him; "what a naughty, sulky, jealous child it is, w *you know, dear Alick*, that I would rather be with you than anywhere e *but I only did it to* please poor mamma. You won't be naughty, "

will you? You'll come in now, and let us have a pleasant hour together before you go?"

Mr. Alexander Macpherson at last consented to abjure solitude, and to make one of the party in-doors. Under the lamplight he appeared a fine-looking young Scotchman enough, though scarcely worth the amount of trouble it had taken to get him there. He was tall and well-favored, with the light-reddish hair, blue eyes, and high cheek-bones which form the characteristic features of his race; and tell tales, too often true, of a hot temper. In addition to this, his bearing was gentlemanly when he chose it should be so, and his age was about twenty-four.

They had all assembled at the piano, and were in the midst of Scotch ballads and Scotch jigs, called for by Mr. Macpherson, when they were interrupted, but not startled, by a loud peal from the bell at the iron gate.

"Who can that be, mamma?" said Christine, speaking in the midst of variations on "There's nae luck about the house."

"Your dress, home from Elise, probably," was the careless reply, as the man-servant passed through the open door on his way to answer the summons. But the indifference did not last long. The iron gate swung back upon its hinges: a voice was heard, loud and decisive, questioning and giving directions, and mother and daughter sprung to their feet simultaneously.

"Mamma, it must be Raymond!" broke from Christine.

"I really think so too," faltered Mrs. Norreys, and her lips turned very white and trembled; for the arrival of H. M. S. "Agincourt" in the Downs had been signalled more than a week before, and they had been expecting from day to day to hear that she had been paid off, and to see Raymond burst into the room, with the certainty of a long holiday before him.

"It *is!*" almost shouted Christine, as the firm footsteps trod the paved pathway, and approached the house. She would have dashed into the hall as she spoke, but the mother touched her gently.

"Let me go first, dear." The words were low, and almost entreating, but at the sound Christine drew back directly. She felt that his mother had the first and best claim to welcome him home.

"Mother!" exclaimed a deep-toned voice, as she reached the hall, and a pair of arms were opened to receive her trembling form, whilst she could only murmur, "Oh, my boy?—my dearest boy! is it really you?"

But as Christine now advanced, thinking her time was come, he gave a sudden start, and left his mother, but stayed his steps as suddenly, saying, with a sigh, "How I had hoped to meet my Rachel here! Are there no letters for me, mother?"

His sister flew into his embrace, and he kissed her, though almost mechanically, looking round the while for his mother's answer.

"None, dear Raymond!—not since the last I forwarded to you."

"Well—well! it doesn't much signify," he said, as he released Christine and walked into the dining-room, but there was a look of the blankest disappointment on his face, nevertheless. The two women followed, not knowing what to say to comfort him, but he scarcely seemed to notice their action; he drew a chair to the table, and placing his elbows upon it, sat down, and leaned his head upon his hand.

"I suppose you have heard all about the poor doctor's illness," remarked Mrs. Norreys, presently. "In his last letter to me he does not seem to have much hope of his own recovery."

"So Rachel tells me, poor child!" replied Raymond; "but sick men are apt to have fancies about themselves. When did you hear last from my wife?"

Mrs. Norreys looked at Christine, and Christine looked at her mother, but neither of them spoke—the truth being that Mrs. Raymond Norreys, although she knew her husband's relations, having spent some time at Abbey Lodge after his departure from England, had never much troubled either her mother or her sister-in-law with epistolary correspondence, and, at the present, months had elapsed since her last communication had arrived.

"The fact is, dear Raymond," said his mother, after a little while, "Rachel is young, and does not much care about letter-writing, I dare say: few young people do. She was very good last year, but her father's illness, and the life they lead at Gibraltar, and—"

"Well—well! but when did you last hear from her?" interrupted the young husband, with an impatient movement of the foot.

"Not since Christmas, I think, was it not so, Christine?" said Mrs. Norreys, almost timidly, as she appealed to her daughter's memory.

"Last Christmas!" laughed Raymond. "Then I must not come for news to you. Mother, if you will let me know which is to be my room, I'll just run up and make myself presentable, for I am in a dreadful state of disorder now, and I will tell you all you will want to know about myself when I come down again."

Mrs. Norreys proceeded to show him the room at once, to which his luggage had already been conveyed, and then returned, brimming over with happiness, to see that a substantial repast was prepared to greet her son with when he should be ready to discuss it.

"He is sure to be hungry, Christine," she said; and the two women made themselves happy, as women can, by taking an immense deal of unnecessary trouble for the creature they loved, whilst Mr. Macpherson, who had felt very much in the way ever since the arrival of the son and brother of the house, crept out of the drawing-room, where he had been amusing himself in the dark by picking out Scotch tunes upon the piano with one finger, well pleased at emancipation from his own company.

In the meanwhile, Raymond Norreys, instead of making himself presentable as quickly as possible, sat down on the side of his bed, and began thinking. He had been prepared for the fact that he would not meet his young wife at the Abbey Lodge, for he knew that the 3rd Royal Bays had not reached England; and yet, notwithstanding the knowledge, he could not dispel a certain feeling of disappointment at its realization.

For months past he had pleased his fancy by picturing to himself his return to England, and the bright, expressive face of Rachel, as he remembered it, enhanced by all the womanly graces which he had dreamed of her as year by year attaining, being the first to shine upon him through that old oaken door when he should see it next.

He had hoped, until hope had seemed reality, that the first form his arms should enfold would be that slight young figure which used, even in his boyish days, to seem as nothing in his grasp, and which, they told him now, whilst it had rounded into shapelier and more finished curves, had lost nothing of its grace or suppleness.

His had been no boyish love, no fleeting youthful fancy, for the girl whom he had married. Indeed, it is doubtful if such a character as his, so determined in its course, so straightforward and decided in its actions, could ever have been termed "boyish" in the general acceptation of the word; for there had never been anything simple, or weak, or wavering about Raymond Norreys. He was as energetic as Rachel herself—perhaps as excitable—although he had his feelings under far better control. Although neither of great height or bulk, there was a look and an air about him well calculated to strike a woman's imagination, because well calculated to control her will.

In figure he was of the middle size, but there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his body, and every muscle was firmly knit and well developed. The only feature about him which might have appeared to betoken want of strength was the size of his hands and feet, which, for a man, were small and very shapely. His head was small and well set upon his shoulders, which, with his chest, were broad for his general size. His hair, jet black, was thick and abundant; but he wore it so closely cut that its thickness was not observable, except to the touch; his eyes were invariably taken for the same color, but they only turned so when he was excited or angry. In reality they were of a rich dark brown, so variable that their expression could change from a hard, stony, unlifelike gaze to one of velvet softness, as quickly as he could turn his look from the contemplation of a person he cared nothing about and let it rest upon the face of the creature he cherished most upon earth. But in this variableness lay their chief

charm, for they were not large eyes, nor particularly handsome ones. They were deeply set, and rather close together, yet without imparting anything like a sly or sinister expression to his face, for the general idea his appearance conveyed was that of the most rigid straightforwardness.

His nose was small, and his mouth was like his eyes, inconstant, but essentially sweet in its seeming when its owner felt sweetly disposed. At present it was compressed, and did not show a single specimen of that phalanx of white and regular teeth with which this enumeration of the excellencies of my hero may cease.

He was not perfect, far from it, but he was exceedingly gentlemanly and sensible-looking, and possessed none of those bearish attributes which it seems to be the fancy of authors to father upon their naval characters. At any rate, Raymond Norreys could lay no claim to them; on the contrary, perhaps from a feeling that sailors are supposed to be ruder and noisier than the rest of society, he was invariably known to be very quiet when there; far more so than when at home, for his disposition was naturally very gay, and often overrunning with spirits.

They did not appear likely to exceed the bounds of decorum, though, on this night of his return to the Abbey Lodge, after five years' absence from it, for his demeanor, as he sat absorbed in his own thoughts, was almost mournful.

"My darling girl!" he said to himself, "I dare say my mother's lectures on propriety have been so strict, and her letters altogether so prosy and so much like sermons, that she has frightened my Rachel into dropping the correspondence altogether. And my dear girl's letters to me lately have not seeemed so cheerful and happy as they should have been. I wonder if she misses me, and begins to fret at our long absence; it was a sin to condemn her brightness to five years widowhood. My pretty bird! I wonder if her soft, sweet eyes are as bright as they used to be, and if she has quite forgotten all her arch, winning, naughty little ways! Well I shall soon judge for myself. Thank Heaven, Gibraltar is no distance." And then he fell to pondering on a certain expression which Rachel's eyes had worn when, on their mockery of a marriage day, she had turned from her father's embrace and rushed into his, and held him to her with those graceful, girlish arms, as if she could not let him go. He wondered if she would meet him again just in the same manner: he would like nothing better than to hold her so, and to be able to say to her, — Rachel, no one can ever separate us again; I have fulfilled my part of the contract, I have come now to claim yours." Would she blush, and hide her sweet face? Would she —

But his wonderings as to what she would do were here cut short by the voice of his sister Christine at the door, inquiring if he were ready to come down to supper. And then he jumped up and smoothed his ruffled hair and washed his hands, and went down-stairs very much the same as he had gone up. But now he was Raymond Norreys again; he had reasoned himself out of his irrational disappointment, and was ready to do his duty amongst his own people. He found time to re-embrace his mother, and ask for her congratulations on their safe reunion; to observe his sister, so grown and altered in the years they had been parted as to be almost unrecognizable, and to be introduced by her, with many blushes, to Mr. Alexander Macpherson, of whom he had already heard. And when they sat down to supper there could hardly have been found a happier, merrier quartette in Brompton, although Mrs. Raymond Norreys was not sitting at her husband's right hand on the festive occasion. But a little communication which Raymond had to make to his mother and sister, and which he had carefully kept back until now, rather threw cold water on the last part of the entertainment.

"I suppose you will be writing to Gibraltar by the next mail, Raymond?" observed his mother; "the steamer goes the day after to-morrow."

"No, I shan't," replied Raymond, but rather awkwardly, blushing in his plate as he spoke, — "because I shall be on board of her; I am going to Gibraltar by the next mail."

"Raymond!" cried his mother, and "Oh, Raymond don't!" came in expostulatory tones from his sister, but he was quite decided.

"What is there to make such a fuss about?" he said, when their be

had a little subsided. "It is nothing of a trip, and I must go to bring my wife over. You forget, my dear mother, that however glad I am to get back to old England and home, — and God only knows how glad I am, — that my first duty is towards Rachel, particularly if, as is likely from your accounts of my father-in-law's health, she may be in distress and alone. Besides, which," he said, warming with his subject, and losing an habitual shyness he had to speak of any of his inmost feelings in public, — "besides which, it is what I have been dreaming of, and longing for, for five long years. You would be none the better for my staying here, mother; for I fancy I should be anything but an agreeable companion just now, for I should be hankering after Rachel day and night. I've got my leave here from the Admiralty," he concluded, slapping his waistcoat pocket. "They behaved like bricks, and sent it to me immediately; and all I have to do is to take my berth, run over to Gib, and bring back my dear little wife to Abbey Lodge as soon as steam will do it all. I'm forgiven, mother, am I not?"

What could they do but forgive him, and admire him all the more for the devotion he showed to the girl he had married in his hot-headed youth! But he was so impatient and restless even during the few hours that intervened before he could start for Gibraltar, that, much as they loved him, his mother and sister were almost thankful when he was at last off. And so Raymond Norreys set out upon his way to claim his looked-for prize, with hope making all the future one coming glory to him; and the name of Rachel the magic lullaby which alone could soothe his impatience, and the last word which was each night chased by slumber from his faithful lips.

CHAPTER VII.

RACHEL IS LEFT ALONE.

Dr. Browne did not fulfil Dr. Harris's prediction that he would not last more than three days from the time that the news of his approaching death was broken to his daughter. He survived it for a week. He was excessively feeble, — so much so that, for the last forty-eight hours, he could scarcely be said to live; but yet he was alive. In his younger days he had been a man of great muscular power and with an iron constitution, and his hold on life in consequence was very tenacious. He had wrestled with the Great Enemy for weeks longer than a more ordinary mortal would have done; but the struggling was over at last, and he succumbed. No one told him that the change was so near; but he seemed to know it by intuition. Perhaps he guessed it by the pertinacity with which Rachel clung to his side, refusing to leave it even for her meals, or if, persuaded by his entreaties, she did so, returning in such haste and with such tell-tale eyes, that her father knew she had only gone away to cry. He may have read the truth in the earnest gaze so often fixed upon him, as if she feared he might fade away and vanish then and there, and leave her to her dreaded loneness before she had realized that he was going; or in her low and gentle voice when she addressed him, so different from her former tone of vivacity. Any way, he knew it; and Rachel felt that he did so, although he never openly mentioned the fact to her, — perhaps because there seemed something sacred in the hushed grief depicted in her face, or that he shrunk in his weak state from changing her forced calmness into one of those storms of passion in which he had so often seen her indulge in the days gone by. Once he had thought of doing so, for he commenced to say, "Rachel, my child, I want to tell you something;" but she had stopped him with a rain of tears, and sobbing out —

"Oh! don't papa! — I cannot bear it — I know it all — but do not say the words!" — had fallen on his breast, and hidden her face there, as if with sunshine she would shut out the truth. There had been friends to see her daily during that sad week. Eliza Arundel, of course, with a pompous show of affection, and overrunning with terms of commiseration, making

the sick-room rather too noisy with her presence, and Rachel, relieved for her father's sake (notwithstanding that she loved her), when she withdrew for her usual drive. And later in the evening, when the dews had fallen and darkness was on the house over which the angel of death was hovering, a heavier but more subdued step would steal into the verandah and call on Rachel's name, to hear how his old comrade was that night, and, strange to say, tears would come at the kindly pressure of the husband's hand, which the wife's loud tones of pity and assurances of affection never possessed the power of raising; and in after days Rachel always connected her best comfort of that time with poor old Jack Arundel; and when she thought of her lost father, gratefully intertwined the two memories together. Not that Cecil Craven was slow to sympathize with her, or backward in expressing his feelings; but he did not possess the same quiet tact in showing it, and which made Major Arundel's visits after dark almost as congenial to her as might have been a woman's tears. Poor Captain Craven was very desirous to be of use, and very solicitous that he should be employed; but he had never been accustomed to a sick-room, and his tread was, to say the least of it, apparent, and his touch clumsy. But though he always appeared sadly out of place there, and was invariably in the way whenever Rachel wanted anything, and had to shift his position and apologize, yet he could look very commiserating with his soft, sleepy blue eyes. And Rachel liked to feel a friend was near her, though he only slept his time away in the verandah, and was sorry when duty or the mess-table called him away, and glad when he joined her solitary meals and kept her from brooding upon her coming troubles; so that when the last day came, and Dr. Browne, after lying for nearly forty-eight hours in a species of stupor, suddenly roused himself, and turned his eyes, looking more like his own eyes than they had done for weeks past, upon Rachel, her exclamation of pleasure brought Cecil Craven in from the verandah to learn the cause.

"He is better, Cecil,—I am sure he is,—isn't he Caroline?" she said, appealing, in her pleased surprise, to the woman to whom she had scarcely spoken in her distress. But Mrs. Wilson only shook her head, and was respectfully silent; and Cecil Craven said, "Be brave, dear Rachel,—this is the time for it."

And then she knew that this was only a temporary rousing, permitted by the bounty of heaven, before her father lay down again to sleep forever. She was brave,—she did not cry out nor lament over her brief hope, so suddenly extinguished; she only crept nearer, and knelt by the dying man's side, and slipped her arm gently beneath his neck, so that his head might rest upon her bosom. Her face was very pale, and her heart beat loudly, but her eyes were dry as she fixed them on those of her father. He knew her, and smiled,—just such a peaceful, happy smile as a child gives when it is sinking safely to sleep in its mother's arms. And then he turned his eyes towards the figure of Caroline Wilson, standing at the foot of his bed, and lifting his feeble hand with an effort, slightly waved it.

"Papa wishes you to leave the room, Caroline," said Rachel quickly.

"I don't think my master can mean that," rejoined the servant, in rather an offended tone.

"Go," said the sick man convulsively. There was no mistaking his meaning this time, and she left, with a remark on "some people's gratitude" hovering on her tongue.

Then Dr. Browne turned his eyes—again growing languid—upon Rachel's face, and whispered: "Any one else here?"

"Only Cecil, papa; you don't mind Cecil, do you?"

"I *want* him," he replied, slowly. His words were not indistinct, but each one was forced out with a kind of gasp, as if the tongue was forgetting how to speak. Then Cecil Craven came nearer, and took the hand of his old friend, which was cold and clammy and utterly powerless, in his grasp.

"I am here, Dr. Browne, close to you."

"Cecil—you have—not—forgotten—swear again—you will never—repeat it—swear by God."

"By God, sir," repeated Cecil Craven, solemnly.

"Rachel, too! Swear, my child."

"I have sworn, father," she said; "I will keep my oath."

"Again — again," he murmured.

"By God, and as I hope for heaven!" she exclaimed, with all the warmth of her enthusiastic nature. "Father, may I never see you again — never meet the look of your dear eyes — never feel the clasp —— Oh! my God — my God!" cried the girl, breaking down as the thought of her coming loss pressed upon her, "what shall I do without you?"

The father's eyes — so soon to become insensible and dull — were fixed upon hers by an influence almost magnetic.

"Love her, Cecil," he said, "*love* her and protect her always — my child — my Rachel!"

Then she laid her wet cheek against his, and called herself by every name she could imagine for her weak selfishness and want of bravery.

"Forgive me, father," she said, entreatingly, "I am calm now. I am ready to bear anything. Life is not so long, and when we meet again, we shall wonder that we fretted so at the short separation; is it not so, darling?"

But he could not answer her, the power of speech was gone. For nearly an hour she knelt, as she had first placed herself, with her father's head upon her bosom, her arms fondly twined around him. The evening — it was evening time — wore on, the dying head grew heavier and heavier, chilling with the damps of coming death each fibre in her warm young breast. The dying eyes were dull and blank — and no longer seemed as though they looked at anything; the hands and feet were cold, and a profound stillness rêigned on everything around. Every now and then, Rachel's trembling voice might be heard addressing a fond word to the inanimate figure before her, but her sentences generally died away in tears; at intervals Cecil Craven whispered a little comfort, or pressed her hand, almost as cold as her dying father's, in his own warm clasp. Once, Caroline Wilson entered the room, but was dismissed again by him with such a rebuke that she did not soon forget it. And then the hour was nearly gone, and Dr. Harris' tread was heard advancing up the garden path to pay his evening visit. Captain Craven rose, and meeting the newcomer in the verandah in a few words gave him to understand how the case lay. The two gentlemen re-entered together. Rachel never turned her head at Dr. Harris's approach, but kept her eyes steadily fixed on those of her father. But the medical man stepped at once to the bedside and lifted the heavy burden from off her bosom to its former resting-place. She attempted to remonstrate with him, but his first words were decisive.

"That is not your father, dear Mrs. Norreys; he is better off than even in your arms."

Then she experienced a second shock, almost as great as if she had not been watching and waiting for this, and this only, for the last week. She suffered Dr. Harris to take the dead form from her embrace; she heard his words and understood them, but she did not move from her kneeling posture.

Not until Cecil Craven put his arms around her and tried to raise her, and whispered something in her ear which seemed to put new life into her frame.

"Cecil," she said, in a burst of tears as she rose without assistance, and permitted his arms to entwine her figure and support it. "Cecil — what were his last words? I cannot remember. I did not think he would never speak again."

"Love her, Cecil," he whispered; "love her and protect her always. And I will, Rachel, so held me God!"

She turned her face to his, suffered him to press his lips upon her forehead, and passed from him to the privacy of her own room. And there she stayed until the evening of the next day, when her father's funeral was to take place. No one saw her during that interval, for she would not even admit Caroline Wilson into her presence, nor open the door at the continuous entreaties of Cecil Craven that she would at least swallow a glass of wine. When the funeral was over, when she knew by the familiar sound of the three volleys fired over the grave that *that* which had been her *father, but which she had* refused to look at when once she was assured

that it was no longer him, was hidden away out of her sight, and that her eyes could not encounter it by breaking through her solitude, she unlocked the door of her own accord, and walking into the drawing-room, told Mrs. Wilson to bring her bread and a glass of wine. When it was set before her, she drank, and felt after it, for the first time that day, that she could trust her voice to speak without breaking down.

The sight of Mrs. Wilson as she stood near her, every now and then passing a finger over moist eyes, aggravated Rachel, and dispersed even the desire for tears in her own. What right had this woman to profess to mourn for her father; she who had served them both for money only? And there was not a shadow of sympathy in Rachel's voice as she coldly gave her the orders necessary for her to receive.

"I am going to Mrs. Arundel's to-night. You can pack up my boxes and send them over there."

"At once ma'am?"

"Whenever they are ready. I shall go there as soon as—as they return." The last words came out with an effort, and Rachel applied herself to pouring out wine until it overflowed the glass. She would not give this woman even the opportunity of pitying her. Then she added:

"I wish to tell you, Caroline, that I shall not require your services after to-night. What wages are due to you?"

The servant did not express the least surprise at her summary dismissal. She had expected no less.

"The committee will pay me what is due, ma'am, when it sits. I may consider myself free, then, to enter on any new lady's service to morrow?"

"Oh! have you got another service?" said Rachel. "I am glad of it." She did not feel sufficient interest in the woman to ask the name of the mistress she had engaged herself to. "Yes; you can go as soon as you have despatched my boxes to Major Arundel's."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Not another word passed between them of either question or command. Soon afterwards Cecil Craven and Dr. Harris entered the room, each with a piece of crape round his arm, and his sword-knot muffled in the same material, and asked if Rachel was ready to accompany them to her friend's house; for it had been a thing agreed by letter between the ladies that morning that Rachel should go and stay with Mrs. Arundel as soon as the funeral was over. There was no need for her to be in the house, for beyond her own personal effects everything that had belonged to Dr. Browne was placed under a seal, and put in the charge of a certain number of his brother-officers, who constituted a committee for settling all his claims and selling all his property. And as the regiment expected to leave Gibraltar so soon it was doubly necessary that this should be looked after at once. With the exception of her father's watch and chain, his sword, desk, and private papers, which were handed over to his daughter, together with a lock of his hair, thoughtfully enclosed in the desk by Dr. Harris, everything was to be brought to the hammer at once, and the proceeds to be placed to Rachel's account, as was desired by her father's will. Further than this he had nothing to leave her, for private fortune he had none, and his savings had never been savings long. She rose when Dr. Harris and Cecil Craven entered, and expressed herself ready to leave the house with them at once.

"I have given the order about my things," she said, "and they will follow me this evening."

She raised her hat, which was lying on the table, to her head, and passed out of the place which had been her home, without another look at anything there. Not one glance at the bedroom so lately made vacant; not one at her own, the arbor, at one time, of so many innocent and happy thoughts. She seemed only too glad to leave them all behind her, and to shut out the sight, as she would wish to do the memory, of past pleasure. But when she stepped into the verandah, there was Barnes, faithful, honest Barnes, who had served the doctor ever since they had joined the regiment, and who had very suspiciously red eyes as he now came forward to carry his young mistress' cloak, and to see her put into the pony-chaise. With Caroline Wilson she had been cold; but coldness was no part of Rachel's

acter. She thrust out her little hand, and suffered it to become absorbed in the fist of honest Barnes as she tried to communicate something like a squeeze to his hardened palm.

"Oh, Barnes!" she said, sobbing as her eye met the signs of grief so evident in his, "I am so much obliged to you for all you have done for him. God bless you, Barnes!" and then turning to Dr. Harris, she said eagerly, "Dr. Harris, you must let Barnes have the watch and chain; I know *he* would have wished it; and you will always wear them, Barnes, won't you, for his sake and mine?" And then she hurried to the pony-chaise, followed by Barnes, who could not express his gratitude at first, but found courage to say in a low voice, as he folded the wraps about her feet, —

"I shan't forget your goodness, miss: you're every inch like him, and I couldn't say better of you;" and then fearing he had overstepped the bounds of military etiqutte, suddenly drew himself up as if a poker had been thrust down his back, as Dr. Harris and Captain Craven stepped into the little carriage, and stood like a statue, with his hand raised to his forehead, until the pony had been put in motion and turned the corner which led to Major Arundel's house.

Elise Arundel received her bosom friend with an exuberant display of affection, which was rather too officious to be soothing to a spirit so wounded as was Rachel's.

"Now, my dear girl," she said, as she followed her into the bedroom prepared for her reception, and Rachel expressed a wish to have "just one cup of tea, and then go to bed." "Now my dearest Rachel, I cannot allow you to shut yourself up like that. It will do you harm, cherie, and make you worse. What *I* say is, when a thing's over, it's over; and it's no use remembering it longer than we need. You must join us at dinner; there will only be Craven and myself, (and you don't call *him* a stranger, eh! petite mechante?) and after that you can go to bed if you like."

"But it is so soon," faltered Rachel.

"Tu ne m'aime pas," said Mrs. Arundel, with a shake of her head, intended to be reproachful.

"Oh Elise!" remonstrated Rachel; "and now, when I have fewer friends than ever." And she commenced to give way again to her grief.

"Well, then, you will do as I ask you, carissima, for *my* sake, will you not? and you will feel much better after the little effort. Come, that is a settled thing."

And so poor Rachel was tormented into joining the family dinner on that first sad day of loneliness, and to listen — with dry eyes, indeed, for she was too proud to break down before servants, but with a brain on fire — to the ordinary regimental topics (often suddenly dropped when their details became at all connected with the events of the last two days) which formed the conversation, and in which Cecil Craven took a very meagre share. For he felt for Rachel, and could not bear to see her at the dinner-table, suffering as he knew she was. As he met her afterwards in the drawing-room, he said to her, —

"Why do you come out of your room, when I can see it is so painful to you?"

"Elise persuaded me to it," replied Rachel; "she thought it would do me good."

"Stuff and nonsense!" he replied; "go to bed now if you wish it."

"Will you make my excuses?" she asked, for their hostess was out of the room at the moment.

"Of course I will. Good night."

She echoed the word and left the room, thankful to be released. And when Mrs. Arundel pursued her a few minutes afterwards with the evident intention of bringing her back to the drawing-room by main force, she found her friend stretched in a dead faint across the bed, and for the first time suspected that she had gone too far in forcing Rachel Norreys, strong as was her spirit, into keeping up the unnatural strain which her nerves had experienced during the past week.

She had broken down under the attempt. She had an immense stock of mental courage, but very little bodily strength with which to back it. Un- r *excitement she could* do anything, but the necessity for action with- n. *and Rachel was* feeble as a child.

Now, as she lay unconscious upon her bed, her slender limbs looking so unwomanly in their apparent lifelessness — her eye, through which the energetic spirit was used to shine and blazon, closed and inanimate — it would have been difficult to guess that in that delicate form there beat a heart large enough to encompass the love of the world, and courageous enough to fill the breast, and that without decreasing from his merit, of the bravest man that ever stepped this earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISGIVINGS.

It is not to be supposed that, even in her distress for her father's death, Rachel could entirely lose sight of the fact that Raymond Norreys might arrive in England any day, and claim her as his wife. Indeed, when the shock of the first-named grief was a little subdued, the second appeared to gather in intensity, and the two to change places. That which had just passed seemed in the retrospect as if it had been looked forward to for ages, and it was but in the natural course of events that it should happen; whilst this, coming on her with stealthy tread, took an unexpected and sudden form, and the nearer it drew, the less she felt prepared to meet it. She was not without a latent idea, that should Raymond arrive in England first, he would pursue her to Gibraltar; and her one great wish and prayer now was, that the relief transport might make its appearance previously, and that she might be permitted to travel home in company with her friends. But the days gradually crept onwards, and yet no transport was signalled to be in sight.

Rachel did not rise from her bed on the day following her fainting fit. She wished to do so, but Dr. Harris would not hear of it, and she felt too prostrate to resist his will. But on the third day she was up, and busy packing her clothes for the voyage, with many a sigh over the numerous mementos of his affection with which her poor father had laden her. But, otherwise, herself again, and as shy as ever of letting the outer world guess at her inner feelings.

One circumstance occurred that day which very much disturbed her. She shook off the feeling at first, and called it "nonsense," but she found it returning again and again, until she was fain to confess to herself that she was thoroughly annoyed and puzzled by it.

As she was leaving her room for the dinner table she encountered in the drawing-room, which was empty, Caroline Wilson. At first, simply surprised that she should have followed her there, but supposing that she had some favor to ask or communication to make, Rachel demanded her business, and not in the most cordial tone.

"None with you, ma'am; I am waiting now upon Mrs. Arundel."

"Have you come as her maid?" said Rachel, with surprise.

"Yes, ma'am," responded Mrs. Wilson. "I have been engaged to enter Mrs. Arundel's service as soon as I left yours, for some time past."

Her former mistress made no reply at first, but passed on and left her, then returning a few paces, she said, haughtily:

"Well, I don't require your services in *my* room, Caroline, and I beg you do not attend me there. You must know well enough that the memories connected with yourself are not pleasant ones to me."

Mrs. Wilson dropped the most respectful of curtsies.

"Certainly, ma'am; I will acquaint Mrs. Arundel with your wishes, and she will doubtless order me to attend to them." And with a second inclination she left the room.

Rachel was the first recruit for the dinner service, and she had time for thought before the others joined her. She could not understand what she had just learnt. Did Elise believe her, or did she not? For months she had been the depository for all Rachel's grievances with regard to this servant; *for her tales of Mrs.* Wilson's cunning artifice and smooth hypocrisy

of her dishonorable actions, her quiet insolence, and her vindictive tongue; and Elise had sympathized with Rachel for being obliged to retain such a woman about her, and appeared disgusted with her character and goings on. And yet she had engaged her to be her own servant, and that without any reference to Rachel and some time before her father's death; probably at the very moment she was listening to and joining in abuse of her from and with the friend in whom she professed to have entire confidence. Rachel did not think so badly of Elise as to suppose this was an intentional or premeditated affront on her part; she cared for her too much. But the fact remained, and it wounded her in her present state of mind to think that she should not have been treated with perfect openness, and that one of the few friends she had left was not exactly what she had imagined her to be.

She felt sore and tender on the subject, and had no rest until the dinner was over, and she could ease her own honest heart by giving her friend an opportuntity of clearing herself from the imputation of double dealing, which the circumstances at present wrongly (as Rachel believed) threw upon her.

But Mrs. Arundel was only prepared to laugh it off as a matter not worth mentioning.

"You are not serious, surely, amica mia, in asking an explanation for such a very simple thing. I wanted a servant—I have had to put up with a half-caste, as you know, ever since I have been here—and you are about to dismiss yours. What more natural than that I should offer to take her off your hands, voila tout?"

"But you did not offer to take her off my hands, Elise, or I should have reminded you what a bad servant she is."

"Pardon, cherie, she can dress hair, can she not? and alter a dress if necessary; and surely you would not be the one to speak against her good qualities as a nurse."

"As to the first two accomplishments," replied Rachel, "I can say nothing. I disliked her too much from the first day we had her, ever to allow her to touch me; she obeys her orders of course, or no one would keep her; but she does more than she is told. She is intensely officious, and very prying and curious, and——"

"I think I have heard all that before, carissima, or something like it. Caroline herself has not a few tales against a certain little lady's temper, and——"

"And you can listen to a servant's recital of my faults, true or not, Elise? I did not think so meanly of you. There is not a gentlewoman in the land who would dare to say a second word to me against yourself."

"I never said I permitted it, petite."

"No, but you can take her into your service after it, and keep her about your own person. What can the woman think but that you agree with her, and side against me?"

Elise Arundel lifted her white shoulders in contempt.

"What does it signify what a servant thinks or does not think?" she said.

"Nothing to me," rejoined Rachel, "as I have often shown her; but I thought you cared for me too much, Elise, to have a person about you who you know I hate, and who, you strongly suspect, hates me."

"Oh, fal lal, nonsense!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, in a do-away-with-the-matter style. "I am sure Mrs. Wilson knows her duty a great deal too well to hate you, or any lady who has employed her. And as for yourself, darling, it's only a prejudice on your part against the poor woman, a little jealousy, I am afraid, because the poor dear pater thought a good deal about her. Now, confess, is it not so?"

But Rachel was silent.

"Come, my dear girl," continued her bosom friend, in a coaxing voice, as she came nearer to Rachel and commenced caressing her. "Look at the matter in a reasonable light. I couldn't have gone on board ship very well without a servant, and all those children upstairs to look after, and it *was convenient* for me, to say the least of it, to get Caroline Wilson. *Come, cherie, make it* up with your own Elise, or you will make her look

as miserable as yourself." And she coaxed and wheedled the pale lips into giving her a half smile and a kiss, and then the matter was supposed to be amicably settled between them.

"Only promise me, Elise, that that creature is not allowed to come about my bed-room, or I shall have to vacate your house and go to Mrs. Marsh or Mrs. Williams."

For the offers of harborage to the orphaned girl had been many and pressing, and she had little reason to complain of want of hospitality or kindness. But her own particular friend was vehement in her assurances that nothing and nobody should be allowed to vex or disturb her dear Rachel as long as she chose to remain with them; and entreated her again and again to think no more of the unlucky circumstance than she herself had done in bringing it about. And Rachel promised, meaning what she said, and tried hard in consequence, to believe that her dear Elise was perfectly sincere, and that it had been an unfortunate necessity, and nothing more, that had compelled her to engage Caroline Wilson as her personal attendant. For two days after that she never saw the woman, even about the house, and caught herself wondering more than once where she was hidden, or what had become of her. But yet her name alone was so odious to Rachel that she never mentioned the subject, or her surprise at it, although she could not forget that Caroline Wilson was near her. She never entered her room, where the different articles about to be put into her trunks lay in many a confused medley, without running her eye quickly over the various groups to see if they had been moved or in any way meddled with. She never woke in the night and heard the slightest noise, the breeze, may be, getting up from the sea, and rattling the laths of the venetians against one another, or the cry of some large bat or night-bird attracted by the light which she burned, without sitting up in bed and holding her breath and listening to hear the rustle of a dress or the creaking of a shoe.

She often reproached herself for these suspicions; calling herself weak, unjust, and unnecessarily wary: but still they returned, and still, as every night drew on, she felt that she was not safe from scrutiny, and perhaps theft.

Once, as she roused herself suddenly from sleep, with her father's name upon her lips, she was confident that she had heard a sound, as of some article dropped upon the floor, and, at the same time, saw the glimmer of something white which passed by her side and was gone. She could only have fancied or dreamt it, however, for, springing out of bed, she found her room empty and her lamp extinguished, and (when she had lighted it again) everything in its place as usual. No — stay — here was a work-box overturned, but that may have been done before she went to rest, for she had retired early that night, and very weary. As she stooped to replace the fallen box she heard the handle of the door on the opposite side of the house turned once or twice, and apparently ineffectually. She sprung to her own door at once, and saw (oh! how Rachel hated herself for the misgiving which had prompted her to believe it Caroline Wilson,) only her dear Elise trying to regain her bedroom, the portals of which were not in such satisfactory order as could have been desired, When she saw Rachel's figure, white-robed like her own, she gave a little start, and then re-advanced to the table. In one hand she held a lighted taper and in the other a pocket-handkerchief.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "I hope I have not frightened you. I have been suffering agonies all night with the toothache, and not liking to disturb dear Jack, came out to try and find the laudanum for myself, and the wind has blown my stupid door to, and I cannot open it."

"Have you got the laudanum?" demanded Rachel, thinking that of the greatest consequence.

"Well, no, I cannot find it."

"I thought you kept all your medicines in the chest in your bed-room."

But poor Mrs. Arundel's toothache came on so violently at this juncture, that she could only put her handkerchief to her face and groan; and the sound of talking having disturbed her husband, his footsteps were heard

approaching the scene of conference, and Rachel had nothing to do but to beat a hasty retreat to her bedroom again.

When there, although Mrs. Arundel's toothache and the refractory door were sufficient to account for the noise she heard, and the sea-breeze coming in at the window may have blown out her light, she still could not dismiss from her mind the foolish idea that the shadow she had seen flit past her bedside was not all due to her imagination, and that, although she would not hint such a thing to her friend for worlds, Caroline Wilson, had, in some mysterious manner, visited her room that night.

But her doubts on the subject received a far stronger confirmation a few days later, and in which they were assisted by the words of Mrs. Arundel herself. It was the day week of her father's death, and Elise had persuaded Rachel to take a short drive with Major Arundel in the pony-phaeton, excusing herself from accompanying them on the score of a bad headache and unusual lassitude. Rachel was glad to go. The company of poor old Jack was very congenial to her feelings, and, this being the first time she had left the house, the evening air unusually inviting. Major Arundel avoided the general thoroughfares, and drove her gently along some of the by-roads that led away from the town and its insignificant bustle into the quiet country, and there they talked of him who was gone, in a manner that, until then, Rachel had been unable to speak to any one in. They stayed out late in consequence, and they came home by a back path, anxious still to escape observation if possible, by which means they arrived at the stables before the house, and having left Major Arundel there with the pony-phaeton, Rachel walked quietly up the garden path alone, and her light step was through the sitting-rooms and in her own apartment before any of the inmates of the house heard her enter. It was now dusk, and, to her surprise, there was a light burning there, and a figure seated before the table, which rosé up with a hasty cry as she turned the handle of the door, and discovered the startled face of Eliza Arundel. Her hand was full of papers—old letters, memoranda, and bills, and before her was Rachel's desk, wide open, and with half its contents turned out upon the table. She stood where she had risen, deadly pale, staring at Rachel as if she was an apparition, and seemed for the moment to have lost the use of her tongue.

Rachel looked at her rifled desk, at the overturned papers and scattered notes, and her thoughts flew at once to Caroline Wilson.

"Good heavens, Elise! then that woman, Wilson, has been at my papers after all."

As she heard the suggestion a look of intense relief passed over the features of Eliza Arundel, and from pallor her cheeks assumed a bright scarlet flush as she quickly replied,

"Yes, my dear Rachel. What can you think of finding me thus amongst your belongings? but I had hoped to replace them before you arrived. My dear child, I am afraid it is true; some one has certainly been at your desk. As I passed by the verandah window I heard a noise as of footsteps in your room, and knowing your dislike to anything being touched, I looked in, and only saw your desk left open, with all its contents lying about. I came round directly, but whoever it was escaped, so I was about to rearrange them. I have been trying to think who it could have been who had the impertinence to do it."

"Who it could have been," repeated Rachel, contemptuously, "who should it have been, but your delightful waiting-woman, Caroline Wilson. I told you what she was. She will open your desk in the same manner the first time it suits her convenience to do so. Don't take the trouble to rearrange them, Elise; I can do that, and I will lock the desk up in one of my trunks to-night. She shall not get another look at it any way; so I hope she made the most of this one. How foolish of me to have left my keys about."

"Yes, it is very imprudent, dearest child," returned Mrs. Arundel, who had quite recovered from the fright Rachel's sudden entrance had occasioned her; "you mustn't do it again; but you are such a thoughtless little creature. Shall you dress for dinner to-night, darling?"

The "darling" thought she would not dress for dinner that evening if

her dear Elise would excuse her, and then her friend left her alone. Rachel was more indignant than vexed about her desk having been opened; for there happened to be nothing of consequence in it, except a few old letters of her father's, and they were all safe. It was only what she had suspected all along of Caroline Wilson, and she should have been more on her guard against her. But she was really surprised, for she had imagined that the woman was not living in the house at the present moment. Whilst they were at dinner that evening, Cecil Craven walked in.

"Have you heard the news?" he inquired.

No: no one had heard the news.

"The relief transport is telegraphed."

"Is it, really?"

"Really and truly—mail-steamer, also. Now, ladies, you'll have enough to do."

This news was received by the members of the party with very different feelings. Major Arundel's thoughts flew immediately to the men under his command.

"It will be hot work to get them all on board, Craven. I must go up to the colonel's after dinner and hear his orders."

Mrs. Arundel's mind was entirely occupied with the idea of how many trunks there were still to pack, and whether they were likely to get all the clothes home from the wash in time; whilst Rachel could only remember, with a warmer sensation of pleasure than she had experienced for the last few weeks, that the regiment must really embark in the course of a couple of days, and that there was now no doubt but that she should perform the voyage home, as she had so much wished to do, in the company of her regimental friends. She forgot Caroline Wilson and her disordered desk—she forgot even the parting which lay at the end of that voyage, and the probabilities of no other than her husband meeting her at Southampton or Gravesend; she only remembered, with a return of the old enthusiastic excitement and careless forgetfulness of everything unpleasant in the delight of the moment, that what she had so long desired had nearly come to pass, and that there could be no doubt of its fulfilment.

"Shall I tell Wilson to send up his wife to you to-night, my dear?" inquired Major Arundel, as he stood ready accoutred for his after-dinner visit to the colonel; "she will be useful to you in packing. We shall have to start by sunrise on Thursday next, if I am not much mistaken."

"Yes—do—if her own boxes are ready," answered Mrs. Arundel, growing very red as she said so.

But Rachel could have no suspicions in a quarter where she loved. These signs and signals rushed back upon her memory in after-hours and bathed the past in a flood of daylight; but at the moment they bore no significance for her. She looked at her friend as the major took his departure, and said quietly, "Has Caroline been staying at her own house, Elise?"

"Yes," was the rather hesitating reply; "the fact is, I sent her home chiefly on your account" (which was a romance, for Mrs. Wilson had asked for and obtained leave to prepare for the expected voyage).

"Thank you dear," said Rachel, as she stepped to Mrs. Arundel's side and kissed her. She felt quite grateful for this proof of Elise's solicitude that the feelings of her friend should be respected, even at the expense of her own convenience.

"But then," continued Rachel, "how could it have been her who opened my desk this afternoon?"

Mrs. Arundel's large blue eyes dilated wide with innocent amazement.

"How, indeed! Could it have been Mary, Rachel?" naming the children's nurse, a half-caste Portuguese girl.

"Scarcely," answered Rachel, "considering that she cannot read; and, putting that aside, could have no possible interest in my letters. Mrs. Wilson may have walked up from the barracks on purpose. She is quite capable of doing so. But pray let us change the subject, Elise; I dislike even talking of that woman. When is the transport likely to be in, Captain Craven?" she asked of that gentleman, who, not having accompanied Major Arundel to the colonel's, had been enjoying a cigar in the verandah.

"*Perhaps to-night*; perhaps to-morrow morning," he replied. "So

was signalled at six o'clock. If she makes sufficient way she will anchor to-night; if not, she will put in the first thing to-morrow. The mail-steamer is in. Did you not hear the guns?"

"I am afraid none of the 3rd will have much interest to spare for the mail-steamer this time," said Mrs. Arundel; "we shall be able to answer our letters in person. I must leave you, Rachel, to do the honors of coffee to Captain Craven to-night, for if there is one order to give, there are fifty. Send me a cup into my room, dear, and don't expect to see me again this evening."

"I shall come and help you by-and-by," was the reply, as Mrs. Arundel left them to themselves.

"I am so sorry I never found your gold stud, Cecil," said Rachel, drawing her chair close to his, as soon as they were alone, and speaking low; "but I searched for it everywhere without success. It is the most extraordinary thing where it can have rolled away to."

"Never mind," said Cecil Craven, with that true politeness which tries to set every one at their ease. "I dare say I dropped it somewhere out of doors. I am a very careless fellow. Don't think anything more about it, Rachel;" and he laid his hand on hers as he spoke.

"I beg your pardon; is this Major Arundel's house?" said a voice from the verandah.

They turned their heads simultaneously in that direction, and saw the figure of a man standing on the threshold, wrapped in a rough coat, and with a naval cap over his eyes, which, when he distinguished the figure of a lady in the lighted room, he immediately doffed.

"This is Major Arundel's, but he is not at home," replied Captain Craven. "Do you want anything with him?"

"I have just arrived by the mail steamer," said the stranger, advancing into the room with a slight bow; "I came here to see Mrs. Norreys, who, I understand, is on a visit to Mrs. Arundel. If this is the case, will you kindly let her know that her husband, Raymond Norreys, is waiting to see her?"

CHAPTER IX.

ONE FLESH.

She had been sitting with her back towards the verandah and the stranger's face, but as she heard his last words Rachel rose tremblingly and confronted him. She had just assumed the mourning for her father, and as she stood before him, her slight figure looking slighter from her black apparel, her face, pale from the intelligence she had so suddenly heard, her waving chestnut hair all gathered behind her head in one large knot, Raymond Norreys could scarcely associate her appearance with the remembrance of the girl he had parted from, who had possessed the brightest of eyes and cheeks, and curling hair falling in tangled masses about her shoulders.

But he had heard the news of Dr. Browne's death immediately upon his landing and he knew this pale girl in mourning must be the wife he had thought of meeting so ardently and so long.

"Is this my wife?" he exclaimed, advancing towards her. "Rachel, dearest, don't you know me?"

She did not speak, or move one step to greet him. No! she had no recollection of this bright intelligent face which was looking so earnestly into hers—of those dark eyes beaming so affectionately upon her. She could only stare at him, struck with amazement, and feel that her husband was a stranger.

Cecil Craven had merely said, "This is Mrs. Norreys, sir. I will inform Mrs. Arundel of your arrival," before he had made his escape. He felt a scene was coming, and entertained a horror for anything of the kind. He bore down upon Mrs. Arundel with the astounding news that Mrs. Norreys' husband had arrived, surprising that lady in a most unbecoming

dressing-gown, which she had quickly to change before she could appear to welcome the new comer.

"Go into the drawing-room as soon as you can," urged Captain Craven, "or there'll be a row. Norreys looks a regular fire-eater, and Rachel is staring at him and saying nothing. Make haste, there's a good creature, and save her from it!"

"Save her from what?" demanded Mrs. Arundel in a sharp tone; for this solicitude for Rachel on Cecil Craven's part was anything but gratifying to her feelings. "You seem to forget, Craven, that the man is her husband. Rachel has made her bed, and she must lie on it. However, I will really go as soon as I have changed my dress."

"Do," he rejoined; "for I dare not go back. I am off to the colonel's. Good-night!"

And in the meanwhile the husband and wife had stood for some minutes and looked at one another. Raymond saw her tremor and distress, and attributed them at first chiefly to the adverse circumstances under which their re-union was taking place; but when she still remained silent, he repeated his question: —

"Don't you remember me, darling? — your own husband, whom you married in Littleham Church? Ah Rachel! what a long, long time ago that seems!"

He drew nearer, and put his arms around her as he spoke, and she felt that she *must* say something, or tell him all by her silence. And so the faltering words dropped from her tongue: —

"Oh, I am so unhappy!"

"My dear one," he exclaimed, "I heard it all at the hotel just now. I am so sorry, dear Rachel! I wish to heaven I could have been with you a week or two ago, that I might have comforted you through that sad time. My bird! it was hard you should be left alone to suffer; but, for my part, it could not have been otherwise. I only arrived in England a fortnight ago, and this was the first steamer that has left for the Rock since."

Still running on, thankful to have in his arms what he had so longed and hoped for, Raymond forgot to notice that no syllables of welcome or rejoicing fell from her tongue, and that she only shuddered in his embrace and was silent.

"How cold you are, dear," he said, kissing her as he spoke; "and why — how is this? You are trembling. Have you been very unhappy without me all these weary years, Rachel? — have you longed for me as I have longed for you? Well, never mind, they are over at last. You are not much altered, now I come to look at you, dear girl! You are pale and thin, but, please God, the change to England will set you up again, and I shall have my rose a damask rose before the winter sets in."

But here he was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Arundel. As her gracious "Mr. Norreys, I believe," was heard, Rachel turned with a cry from her husband's embrace, and rushed into the arms of her friend.

"Eh, bien cherie, qu'avez-vous?" demanded that lady, as she patted Rachel's bent head with an air of reproach, and acknowledged Raymond Norreys' bow with another inclination of her own. "We are very pleased to see you, Mr. Norreys, though we scarcely expected you so soon. I think you have taken my little friend here rather too much by surprise. Now, Rachel darling, show Mr. Norreys what a woman you can be, and go and pour out the coffee for me."

She had flown to the shelter of her friend's bosom, believing it to be a shelter. She did not like being spoken to as if she were a child, and driven thence as though she had no business there. She passed her hand proudly over her moistened eyes, and reared her stately young head and crossed the room to where the coffee equipage was laid out, her husband's eyes following her moving figure admiringly as she did so.

And then he commenced to thank Mrs. Arundel for her care of, and kindness to, his wife during his absence. Even in the midst of her hurry and distress Rachel could not help pausing to admire the ease with which he chose his language, and the thorough-bred air which hung about him as he gracefully made this acknowledgment, impressing both his hearers as he did so with the conviction that he considered himself the only one fro

whom such acknowledgment was due. Mrs. Arundel seemed wonderfully taken by his address. Her answers were most gracious. She was only too glad to have been of any use to dear Rachel, and she hoped that Mr. Norreys would consider himself their guest also until such time as the regiment left Gibraltar, which, perhaps he had heard, would be almost immediately.

Mr. Norreys was perfectly aware of it. "In fact," he continued, "we came alongside of the transport-steamer almost all the way, and only passed her this afternoon. She will anchor to-morrow morning."

"Then I shall consider you my guest until we start," said Mrs. Arundel, with her sweetest smile.

"You are very kind," returned Raymond Norreys, "but I could not think of putting you to such inconvenience, and have already engaged rooms at the hotel. I dare say we shall be in England almost as soon as yourselves, for the mail-steamer is expected from Malta, I hear, in a few days."

Smash! Down came the coffee-cup from Rachel's unsteady hand as the words left her husband's lips, and the next moment she sat down in the chair next to her, and began to cry bitterly.

"Oh! I must go in the transport," she said, vehemently; "I must go in the transport. I *cannot* go in the steamer. Oh, Elise! keep me with you."

They had both started from their seats as the noise of the falling china roused them, and were at her side together.

"Rachel, dearest, what is the matter?" exclaimed Raymond Norreys, his face all alight with love and anxiety to learn the reason of her sudden distress.

"Mr. Norreys, would you oblige me by calling the servant? he is probably only at the back of the house," said Mrs. Arundel hastily; and then as Raymond rather unwillingly obeyed her behest, she added in a lower and angry tone to Rachel—"Rachel! what are you making such a fool of yourself for? Do you want to let the whole nation know that you have a *penchant* for Cecil Craven? I gave you credit for greater sense. I feel quite ashamed of you. Come, rouse yourself."

The remedy was harsh, but effectual, and no second dose of it was needed. Rachel started at her friend's insinuation. The words "for shame" burst from her own indignant lips; and then she rose, shook off the touch of Mrs. Arundel's hand, and dried her eyes. When her husband returned, she was looking herself again, and he thought no more of the little outburst.

After all, it was but natural she should wish to go with her old friends—very natural and very proper; but he would soon make her forget the loss of them. But *she* seemed never to have realized until now what the coming back of this unknown husband would prove to her; it had certainly never struck her mind until that moment, when the coffee-cup fell, that all her hopes of returning to England with the dear old 3rd were like it—smashed. Of course she could not go with them now. She would have possessed no right to a passage before, though, left alone as she was, they would have accorded her one through courtesy. But now, with a husband to look after and provide for her, there would be no such excuse. The disappointment was bitter; but still more so was the thought that Elise, and at such a time, could use unkind words towards her. She might feel for her; she, who knew all. And she had said something, also, that Rachel found still more difficult to forget or forgive. She had coupled her name with Cecil Craven's in a manner which forbade her keeping silence on the subject any more. And as the young wife sat a little apart by herself, musing gloomily on these things, Mrs. Arundel was trying to make her defection pass unobserved by Raymond Norreys, or she appeared to be doing so. She attempted excuses for Rachel to Rachel's husband which galled the young man's spirit, and made him like his wife's bosom friend less than he had done at first. She hinted at her having several friends in the regiment to whom she was very much attached, and, consequently, it distressed her to leave them, even for such a happy occasion as the present. What friends? Mr. Norreys had imagined that Mrs. Arundel was herself his wife's most *intimate lady friend.*

Oh! lady friend! Yes, certainly, so she was; but there were others—.

Now, Mr. Norreys mustn't looked so shocked, for it was nothing out of the common way; they, ladies in foreign stations, did very dreadful things sometimes, there was no doubt, and went the length of making friends of gentlemen occasionally, but then, just consider the lack of female society in such places; that must be their excuse.

Had Mrs. Arundel, then, any such *very* intimate gentlemen friends herself? Now, who said *very?* Ah! she saw Mr. Norreys was a very dangerous man to tell secrets to, and she must be careful what she said. But would she answer his question? Well, then, no! perhaps she had not; but consider the difference in their positions. She had a husband to look after her, and children to engage her attention. (Here Mrs. Arundel's face assumed the pensive and tender maternal expression which it always wore when speaking of her children to strangers.)

Ah! Mr. Norreys little knew how a mother's time was taken up. Dear Rachel might know some day, and she would find then she had very little to spare for anything else. Now, Mr. Norreys must not go and make more out of what she had said than was really meant, or fancy her "chere petite" was light or frivolous. She was very fond of Rachel, devotedly so; that was, perhaps, why she scolded her oftener than she had need to do. Oh, she was a dear creature! A sweet girl! Such a general favorite! Quite the pet of the regiment! They should miss her terribly in the 3rd when she was gone. And such a spirit! Might Mrs. Arundel suggest to Mr. Norreys to be very gentle and lenient with her at first? Her poor father had indulged her very much there was no doubt. If he had not—— well, well, it was of no use talking now about what *might* have been, was it? and Mr. Norreys must think no more of anything she had said than he would of any other woman's chatter. They were privileged nuisances, were they not? with a deprecatory smile, which was intended as a challenge for her hearer to commence a fierce denial of the charge. But, privileged or not, Raymond felt Mrs. Arundel to be so thorough a nuisance at that particular moment that he had not the conscience to deny her affirmation. He had been very restless under the last half of her harangue. He had fidgeted on his chair, and turned his eyes a dozen times to where Rachel sat upon the sofa with drooping head, and wrapt in earnest thought. He did not admire being recommended by this lady, whom he had only known an hour, to be gentle and tender to his young wife. He, who had flown to Gibraltar burning with love for her; only anxious to be allowed to make her his life's happiness by his own devotion. He, who was now only restlessly awaiting the moment when he should get her by herself, and see all the shy timidity she now displayed, charmingly provoking as it was, melt away beneath her wish to make him fully understand how much she loved him. So he replied rather curtly to Mrs. Arundel's hints and entreaties, and ended by summarily producing his watch, and remarking aloud that it was time that they should go. He had a carriage waiting for them at the gate, and perhaps Mrs. Arundel would kindly permit what luggage his wife could not take with her to remain until the morning, when he would send for it.

Mrs. Arundel was agreeable to everything, and Rachel, who had been roused from her reverie by the colloquy, stood up, and prepared to seek her room, closely followed by her friend. But as they found themselves alone, Mrs. Arundel was startled by Rachel turning round with sudden warmth, and asking her the direct question—

"Elise, what did you mean, by saying I have a *penchant* for Cecil Craven?"

"Just what I said, darling," laughed Mrs. Arundel, merrily, "you have a *penchant* for dear Craven, have you not? you *like* him?"

"Yes; but from the manner you said it, one would have thought——"

"What, cherie?"

Rachel was silent.

"Come, dear girl," added Mrs. Arundel, coaxingly, "you are fighting with shadows to-night! I spoke harshly, I am aware, because I didn't know what you might be going to say next, and every one might not view your little fancies in the same light that I do; but I did it with the best intentions, Rachel, otherwise you might have made a scene, and Mr. Norreys

angry. Whatever you may think of your husband, my dear, never let him know it—that's the only safe rule in married life. Those things in the bag will be quite enough for to-night, Rachel, and I will send on the boxes to-morrow. Addio carissima! and don't be a goose."

And this was all the parting comfort her bosom friend had to give her: this was the sum total of the advice—the hope and the assurance that Rachel received in this the hour of, perhaps, her sorest need. As soon as she had re-entered the drawing-room, her husband took the bag from her, and shaking hands with Mrs. Arundel, drew Rachel's arm within his own, and led her down to the carriage which was waiting for them.

"I don't much like your friend, Rachel," he commenced to say, as they began their journey to the hotel, but the rattling of the wheels, and the jolting down the steep hill was so great, that it made conversation almost impossible. So Raymond tried another means of communication, and essayed to take her hand within his own, but Rachel drew it away nervously, and shrunk into the further corner of the vehicle, so he said and did no more until they had arrived at their destination.

But then, when they found themselves in a well-lighted and comfortable private room and screened from all observation, he, first removing with the tenderest care her hat and cloak, took both her hands in his own, and bringing her before him in such a position that he could not fail to see her face, he said—

"Now, my little girl, we are alone at last; and you will no longer be too shy to tell me that you love me, and are glad to see me back again."

But she turned her head rather to one side, and looked away from him, without a word.

"Rachel," said the young husband again, and rather hurriedly, "tell me that you love me, dearest, or only look it, if you will not speak. I have come a long way to procure the happiness of hearing those words a few days earlier."

But still there was no answer. A lie rose once to her trembling lips, but was choked back again by the force of habitual truth in her heart, and she was silent. Then he grew alarmed, and half angry.

"For Heaven's sake, speak!" he said, releasing her hands from his, and pacing the room hastily; "say something, if only to tell me I have deceived myself; Rachel do you love me, or do you not?"

"How can you expect it?" she said in a low tone.

"My God!" exclaimed Raymond Norreys—and, for a moment, said no more. But then he added passionately, "How can I expect it? I expect it by the love in my own heart, which has been faithful to your image through five long years. I expect it by the oath you swore at the altar to keep to me—and me only."

"I *have* kept to you," she replied, slowly.

"Yes; in the letter, I conclude, so; if you *had not*—" he exclaimed, and a dark expression passed over his face as he said the words, that showed there was blood within him that could be dangerous if need be; "but it is idle to speak of such a contingency: I had hoped for more than that from you, Rachel! I have longed for this hour—I have prayed for it. I have even wept for it, and I hold my much-desired future in my grasp this day, only to hear you ask how I can *expect* that you should love me!"

"Raymond!" said Rachel, gaining courage to speak from the exhibition of his despair; "Raymond, you married me, a child, not knowing what I liked or did not like. You left me for five years to grow a woman, with tastes maturing every day, and fancies changing. You left me to forget even your features. Before Heaven!" she said, as passionately as himself, "if you had not spoken your name this night, I should have received you as a stranger. How can you expect to have a woman's love from a woman you have never won?"

He groaned audibly as she said the words.

"I was a fool to expect it," he replied; "a fool to cherish a man's love for you. Is it possible you have quite forgotten what you once felt for me?"

"*Forgotten it,*" she exclaimed, her old excitement lighting up her face, and making her appear twice as charming in her husband's eyes as she had

done yet; "I tell you, I had forgotten even your features. You stand before me now as a newly-made acquaintance. Judge if I can welcome you as a husband should be welcomed! Forgotten!" she repeated bitterly; "I have often wished that I could have forgotten that I lived. I have dreaded your return for months past. I have hoped and prayed against what you say you have prayed for. I wonder why I tell you this! I had no intention of telling it until you pressed me. It has come—and I know there is no escape for me—I have left those I *do* love, and accompanied you here to be your wife. I shall try to do my duty to you, Raymond, but do not demand more from me. You cannot force me to love you; don't make me do the other thing. You asked me for the truth, and you have it. I do not love you—I do not believe I ever shall."

But the last words were added in a lower key, and almost inaudibly.

"Rather a bitter truth!" he replied, with a dash of sarcasm in his calmness which was very sad to listen to; "rather a bitter truth! but I thank you for it, Rachel, all the same. Perhaps it is better I should know the worst at once than that my wife should play the hypocrite to me. But you mistake if you imagine that I am a man to take the letter from you without the spirit of your duty. It is true that I could claim you for my wife if I chose to do it; that I came here so to claim you; but the casket would be worth little to me, Rachel, without the jewel of your love. I married you when you were far too young (God forgive me for the unintentional wrong I did you!) and I see now the mistake I made, and that if I had waited to woo you now, you would, probably, with your maturer taste, have never been won by me. But the mistake was made, and it is irremediable. You have lived too long under the protection of my name for us to separate without bringing a great scandal upon it and you, which I am naturally anxious to avoid. (Besides which, what would you do, poor child! alone as you now are in the world, without a protector of some sort?) Therefore, let me still protect you, Rachel, with the name of husband; let me still have the gratification of feeling that I am near you to contribute to your comfort, I hope, and certainly to your convenience, and I will ask for nothing more———."

She started, blushed crimson, and looked towards him, doubtingly.

"Do not fear to misapprehend my meaning," he said, gently; "we are, at least so far one in interests that I may speak plainly to you. When your poor father (he is fortunate not to have lived to see this day) ——."

"Oh, I thank God that he didn't!" interrupted the girl, midst heavy tears.

"When your father sanctioned our marriage, Rachel, it was on this condition—that I went to sea for another cruise, and did not claim my wife until I returned from it; it might have been only three years—it has proved to be five. Weary years they have been to me, and would have been still wearier, doubtless, could I have guessed what waited to greet me at their close; but we will not speak of that again. You did not wish to wound me, I am sure; and truth, however hard, is dearer to me at any time than a specious lie. But your father would never have permitted our imprudent marriage to remain disannulled had he imagined that when I returned to claim my wife she would have learned to hate me."

Here her hands went up, as if in feeble remonstrance or denial of the charge, but he took no notice of them.

"Therefore I will not claim you as my wife until you love me as he thought you would. I will *never* claim you, Rachel, until you come of your own free will, and put those dear hands in mine, and tell me with your eyes, which I feel are honest and could not look a lie, that I am the one man in all the world who you would choose to be your husband. And I will wait patiently, and believe, until death robs me of the hope, that that day may be shining for me in the future, even now! If I could do more for you, poor girl!" he added, sorrowfully, "I would, but that is, I am afraid, impossible—only believe that I am willing to do as much as I can; and look upon me, Rachel, as a friend—as a brother, if you will; and do not be afraid lest I shall mistake your friendship (if you can give it me) for love, and take advantage of it. And be assured that in all things I shall only seek your comfort as their end, and especially in this—that what

passed between us this night be kept a secret for ourselves alone. It will be best so; will it not?"

"Much best," she answered through her sobs.

"And one thing more, Rachel," he said, as he drew nearer to her: "try to be happy my dear, as far as in you lies: and do not let me think that I have been the means of destroying all that makes life bearable for us both."

And as she raised her eyes to try to thank him for his generous forbearance they encountered his, and his were full of tears.

CHAPTER X.

INTRODUCES US TO CRAVEN COURT.

The dinner-hour at Craven Court was seven o'clock, but it was now a quarter past that time, and the second bell had not yet sounded. Mrs. Craven rang that of the drawing-room rather impatiently, and asked the reason of the delay.

"Mr. Northland is not in yet, ma'am."

"Oh," ejaculated the mistress of the house, as if the circumstance was nothing out of the common way, and the excuse perfectly valid. But Lady Frances Morgan, a young and frequent visitor of Mrs. Craven's, arched her eyebrows in surprise at the nonchalance which her hostess displayed, and re-betook herself to her book with an expression on her face very like disdain, to think that ladies should be quietly kept waiting for their dinner because a middle-aged man was forgetful enough to let the usual hour pass unobserved. But Lady Frances was sufficiently intimate with the manners and customs of Craven Court to know that Mr. Northland was a privileged person there, and that until he made his appearance no dinner would be served! and so all she had to do was to pray for his speedy return. In the meanwhile she read her book, and thought it (the foregoing circumstance, not the volume) "very tiresome."

Other people had thought about it before her, and voted it not only tiresome but strange; for Mrs. Craven was not a woman to defer to most of the fancies of her guests—in fact, if any one else but "Cousin Gus" (as she invariably styled Mr. Northland) presumed to disturb the regularity of her meals she was wont to be very much disturbed herself; not that Cousin Gus could be exactly styled a guest, as he had resided at Craven Court for the last five-and-twenty years—indeed, ever since the owner of it had given up the ghost. Some of Mrs. Craven's kind friends had hinted that it was not at all proper that Mr. Northland should take up his quarters under the same roof as the young widow; had raked up long-forgotten stories of an old engagement between them, or if not an engagement at least a love making which bid fair to end in one, until Mr. Craven came with his thousands and tens of thousands, and separated them.

Some had shaken their heads, and said it was a pity Mrs. Craven did not marry her handsome cousin, for both young and handsome he was when first he became an inmate of her house; others wondered she did not, but these last were strangers only, for every one who knew anything about the matter had heard the conditions of the late Mr. Craven's will, and had no wonder to bestow upon it, for the late Mr. Craven, who held a rental of something over ten thousand a year, and who must have possessed an inkling during his lifetime that his wife had not married him for love alone, had made a provision in his last testament against her enjoying herself after his death, whatever she had done before, by a clause wherein, in the event of her re-marriage, every penny of the liberal settlement he had made upon her, as well as the property of Craven Court, should pass into the hands of his son's guardians, and be kept in trust for him until he should come of age. If she remained a widow, she was amply provided for for life, whilst Cecil's income amounted also to several thousands a year; if she married again she was left penniless, not even the possessions she called private being

admitted to be legally hers. The opinions upon this voice from the grave were various. Old men with gay young wives, and commonplace men with pretty wives, compressed their lips and nodded their heads, and said it was a good will, an excellent will, and Craven was a man of sense; men secure of the hearts of their bosom-partners, who knew that a mention of the probability of their own death would bring the ready tears into the bright eyes, and make the rosy lips they love tremble, said the late Mr. Craven was a selfish brute, and it would have served him right if his wife had bolted from him. Old maids couldn't see what there was to find fault with, for Mrs. Craven would be very well off if she remained single, and what on earth a woman could want with a second husband was beyond them; and wives who had lived to bitterly regret the day they became so, said the young widow, ought to think herself a very lucky woman, and that if she were wise she would be in no hurry to quarrel with the conditions of her husband's will. But what the person most interested in the arrangement, Mrs. Craven herself, thought of it, no one ever knew, for she never discussed the point in public. Evidently she had considered it politic, if not pleasant, to comply with its dictates for she was Mrs. Craven still, mistress of Craven Court, and likely to remain so. When his father died, Cecil had been an infant of three or four years old, and it was not for a twelvemonth after that event that Mr. Northland had paid his first visit to his widowed cousin, a visit which was often repeated, and lengthened each time, until it only seemed natural that he should take up his abode permanently in the bedroom which had come to be considered his own. Not that he did so with any parade or public notification that he was about to settle down for life; on the contrary, to the day he first appears in these pages, he had always spoken of himself as a visitor at the Court, and as if his residence there was only a temporary one. Cecil Craven was his mother's darling and delight; apparently she cared for the welfare of no other creatures in the world but this son and "Cousin Gus." For them she gave up her own will and pleasure; occupied her fingers and her mind, and — waited dinner with equanimity. With others she was naturally rather sharp and dictatorial in manner, although she was too well-bred often to permit her friends to see when she was annoyed. In appearance, although now fifty years of age, she was universally acknowledged to be still charming. In her girlish days she had been a beauty, and had retained her good looks as the years advanced, having preserved to perfection her figure, which was tall and slight, and the clear white skin with which she used to charm her admirers thirty years before, so that these attractions, added to dark eyes and hair and regular features, made Mrs. Craven appear ten or fifteen summers less than her real age.

In disposition she was light-hearted and fond of society; a woman to talk to, and also to engage a listener; in a few words, a woman of the world. But for all her gaiety there were moments when those who knew Mrs. Craven best, said that she had not always a mind entirely at ease; there were times when a dark shadow would suddenly flit across her face, although it might as soon depart; a shadow which told of more than a passing annoyance, which bore the burden of a bitter memory, or the recalling of a lost and regretted joy.

Cecil Craven returned all his mother's love, and apparently with interest, for his was an affectionate and *out-going* heart, though it possessed none of the deeper feelings of hers. The news of the arrival of the transport from Gibraltar, with the 3rd Royal Bays on board, had reached Craven Court that morning, and raised a half hope that Cecil himself might make one of the party at dinner; but his mother knew that until his regiment was fairly settled in quarters at Aldershot the senior captain would scarcely be spared from the scene of action, and that therefore she must wait patiently till he could get leave. But it was tantalizing to think he was so near, and yet not with her, for the Court was not far from Weybridge, and it was more than a year since her son had paid his last visit to England. But as Mrs. Craven was musing on these things, and contemplating her own fashionably-attired figure in the glass, another quarter of an hour slipped away, and Lady Frances Morgan became impatient. She gave something very much like a yawn as she closed her book, and addressing Mrs. Craven, said —

"Do you think Mr. Northland intends coming in to-night, at all?"

Which hint was so strong that her hostess could only ring the bell again, and tell the butler he had better send out one of the servants to see if Mr. Northland was in the grounds, or anywhere near the Court.

"Mr. Northland has just come in, ma'am," replied that dignitary, "and the second bell is about to ring."

And indeed at that very moment the loud clanging sound was heard.

"Come along then, Frances," exclaimed Mrs. Craven, gaily. "We will not wait for Gus any longer. Take my arm, and I will be your cavalier for this evening."

And arm-in-arm the ladies descended together to the dining-room, where the style of everything denoted that the want of money was a thing unknown. Mrs. Craven took the head of the table, and the chair at the foot was reserved for Cousin Gus, who was never displaced from his ordinary seat and office of carver at the family board, even by the rightful lord of the domain, Cecil himself. Before the soup had been carried away, Mr. Northland made his appearance, full of apologies for his late arrival, although, to judge from the look of self-satisfaction on his features, he did not take his own defection very much to heart. Handsome features they still were, though the wreck of what they had been. Of almost the same age as his cousin, Mrs. Craven, he appeared much older, from the fact of his hair and beard being plentifully sprinkled with grey. With soft brown eyes, a small aquiline nose, and a sweet, womanish, undecided mouth, Gustavus Northland, with the weight of half a century upon his brow, looked no wiser and no more fit to take care of himself than he had done at five-and-twenty, or fifteen. He was exceedingly quiet, almost shy in his manners, utterly unable to sustain a conversation, which always dropped still-born from his hands; but very sweet tempered and obliging, caring for no particular hobby except smoking, which he pursued to an inordinate degree, being seldom seen, except at meals, without his meerschaum in his hands. Gentlemanly and polished in his address, he was yet never happy in society; but lounged about all day in an elaborate dressing-gown and smoking cap, in which guise he would haunt the garden, looking more like a Turk than an Englishman; and even when he was attired in ordinary clothes there was an air of dressing-gown hanging about them, which the man carried into everything he said or did. Those who had penetrated the depths of Mrs. Craven's clear bright mind and quick understanding wondered what she found so reciprocal to her feelings in the intercourse she maintained with this supine, inactive intellect, and these opposite tastes, for she was bright, lively, and energetic in the extreme. But the widow did not associate with her cousin, and no one who had followed and observed them through a single day would have said that she did so.

She watched over him and his interests much in the same manner as she had watched over and cared for little Cecil when he was left, some five-and-twenty years before, fatherless. Greater minds than hers have taken pleasure in the same solicitudes before now, and for the benefit, in the eyes of the world, of creatures as responsible. If there was a deeper feeling mixed with her care for Gus Northland — no living soul had any right to whisper it, for Mrs. Craven had never confessed to its existence by word or look; and the days for making the subject one of scandal were at last happily ended.

As Mr. Northland began to make his excuses to Lady Frances Morgan, on the present occasion, Mrs. Craven cut him short, though not unkindly, but as though she feared that he might play his part tamely, and with ill-effect.

"Never mind, Gus; Frances will forgive an old gentleman for once, for forgetting the dinner-hour. What have you been doing with yourself all the afternoon?"

"By Jove! my dear, I can't say; an afternoon is such a length of time to get rid of; I have been strolling by the lake, and sitting on the grass, smoking. Deuced pretty it is down there, too. I wanted you to talk to me, Margaret, and then I should have been quite comfortable."

"*Why didn't you* send for me, or come for me?" she said, looking

affectionately at him across the table. "I would have been glad to sit with you, Gus, if I had known you wished it."

"But we had business to do in Weybridge, Mr. Northland — shopping — and we did it," interposed Lady Frances, with rather an air of defiance at that gentleman, as if she would say, "the convenience of other people in this house is to be studied occasionally, sir, as well as your own."

Cousin Gus laughed. "By Jove! that is the only thing you ladies ever think about, I do believe; give you an hour's shopping, and you imagine that you have done a good day's work, now don't you?"

Lady Frances, who was a belle in her own county, and used to a great deal of homage, resented Mr. Northland's remark, and the conversation thenceforward ran in a very ordinary channel until the dessert was placed upon the table, and the little party found themselves alone. Then Mrs. Craven, said —

"I almost hope we may see Cecil, to-night, Gus: if he can get leave before the last train starts, he will certainly be here."

"I am quite anxious to see this famous Cecil," exclaimed Lady Frances Morgan, "though I feel quite nervous of undergoing his lordly scrutiny, since you say he is so fastidious in his tastes."

"I do not think you need have any fear, my dear, of what he will think of you," remarked Mrs. Craven, significantly.

"No, by Jove, you needn't," said Gus, with a glance of admiration at her blooming contour; for notwithstanding his low appreciation of their mental powers, Mr. Northland was a universal admirer when the sex was fair.

And, indeed, Lady Frances had no reason to put down the assurances of her friends as empty flattery, for she was a very pretty blonde of about twenty years of age, with a pink and white complexion, bronze-colored hair and eyes, and a plump, trim figure. And Mrs. Craven was exceedingly anxious that her young guest should look her best in Cecil's eyes, whenever he might arrive, and viewed her present becoming attire of blue silk with great complacency, for Cecil's mother had a future for him hatching in her brain, a great to-be, in which Lady Frances Morgan's aristocratic birth was to be pitted against his thousands, and the latter were to win the day.

"But he must have seen so many different styles of beauty during his travels," sighed the girl, who was romantically disposed, and not disinclined already to fall in love with Cecil Craven before she had seen him, from the glowing description his mother had given her of his various qualifications; "and our English type must appear very insipid beside the remembrance of the charms of Spanish ladies."

"I do not think Cecil has met with many Spanish beauties at Gibraltar," replied Mrs. Craven, "at least not of the best style; but whenever I have heard him compare the ladies he has met abroad with those of his own land, his argument has always been in favor of his countrywomen. I am sure you will like Cecil, Frances, he is so perfectly free from the mannerisms of most young men of the modern age, at the same time that he has learnt all that is to be learnt from mixing in the world and good society; and with it, he is such a home bird; I do not believe, with all his love of gaiety, Cecil is ever really happier than when he is sitting here in the evenings quietly with us. Oh! he is such a fine fellow, and such a dear, good son!" And Mrs. Craven's eyes felt unaccountably moist as she spoke of her absent one, and recalled his perfections to her visitor.

"Dear Mrs. Craven," said Lady Frances, who had observed the slight emotion, "how very fond you must be of him! I only wish my mother cared half as much for me. I have often thought what a pity it is that you have not a daughter to be always at home with you. A daughter would have been such a comfort to you, and nearly as loveable as a son, — would she not?"

"A comfort? I should think she would have been a joy! a blessing! an angel from heaven! Oh! how I wish I had one, — I wish I had a daughter to love, and cherish and protect, — I wish I could have one to keep by me

always! God knows, I should have been a better, happier woman than I am, if He had given me a daughter *for myself*."

She spoke so rapidly, and with so many tears, that Lady Frances could barely catch the import of her words. But the girl was frightened at her mood, so unusual and so strange, and did not know what to do or say. Was this the gay, *insouciante* mistress of the Court, who was always as eager to forward any amusement, or even to join in it, as a girl might have been,—certainly as equable in her temperament, as unvarying in her good spirits, and as cheerful in general society as any woman of half her age. But as Lady Frances was about timidly to approach her friend, and try to say something commonplace, she was surprised to see Cousin Gus, after looking at Mrs. Craven for a few seconds from the opposite side of the table, suddenly rise and seek her side. When there, he put his hands nervously upon the drooping head and the other round her figure.

"Come, dear Margaret," he said, "you are forgetting yourself. You are not alone,—you have your guests with you. Rouse yourself, my dear,—remember where you are. Come, Meg, be calm—for my sake."

He seemed to hesitate at first whether he would put in the last clause: but when he had decided, he said it firmly. Lady Frances was taken by surprise. He no longer looked like the indolent, fine gentleman, who appeared indifferent to everything but his pipe and his dinner. On the contrary, his voice was more than persuasive: it had in it almost an air of command, notwithstanding that his words were so gentle; and when he had concluded his speech, he put his hands beneath his cousin's arms, and forcibly raised her into an upright position.

Stranger still, Mrs. Craven did not seem to resent the action, nor to think it out of the common way. She did as Cousin Gus desired her: she sat upright, dried her eyes, and was smiling again, almost before he had accomplished the proceeding.

"Thank you, Gus," she said, as she did so. "You know the queer moods I have sometimes, and how to treat them. Thank you, my dear. The heat has been great to-day, and I dare say I have overtired myself. Come, dear Frances, if you have finished your dessert, we will take our departure for the drawing-room. It is nine o'clock, I see; but I do not quite despair yet of having my boy here to-night, and I must give some orders about the preparation of his room."

And the ladies left the dining room, as they had entered it, together. But when they had mounted half of the broad staircase which led to the upper apartments, and found themselves upon the landing, Mrs. Craven drew Lady Frances into a small conservatory which adjoined it and said, nervously—

"I hope I didn't frighten you, my dear child, just now; but I am a little excited, I think, in the prospect of Cecil's arrival. I have not seen him, you know, for more than a year."

"Oh, no!" said Lady Frances, feeling she must say something; "and I am sure it is very natural, dear Mrs. Craven; but I never would have said what I did if I thought you would have minded it. And you will have a daughter some day, I dare say," added the girl blushing, "when Captain Craven takes a wife to himself."

"Yes," replied the mother, but mechanically, and as if her thoughts were far away, and then added, hurriedly, "Frances, I had a daughter once, and lost her, and the subject is painful to me; so don't mention it again, please."

"Had you really?" exclaimed the girl, her eyes opening wide with surprise. "I thought you had never had any other child but Captain Craven."

Then Mrs. Craven's countenance fell, as if she already regretted that she had made the avowal.

"I had; but it is long ago, and forgotten by almost me. Never mention it to any one, Frances: promise me that you will not. I could not bear to have the subject revived. I am sorry that I told you."

Lady Frances gave the promise, not once, but a dozen times over, in deference to the mother's wounded feelings; then they went into the drawing-room together.

The evening wore away, and still no Cecil made his appearance; and poor Mrs. Craven had looked so sad, and so weary, that it was almost a relief when the clock announced that the last train must have come in without bringing the expected arrival, and that, therefore, the household might retire to rest as soon as was convenient to it.

Lady Frances was young, and not used to find any difficulty in falling asleep, and so it startled her greatly, when she had been slumbering for about half an hour, to find herself suddenly roused by a light in her eyes, and a voice in her ear, and waking to see Mrs. Craven bending over her bed. At first she imagined something must be the matter, and started up in alarm; but her hostess soon quieted her.

"Don't be frightened, Frances. If I had known you were already asleep, I would not have come in. I only want to warn you again about repeating what I told you to-night. You are too young to understand how much trouble and annoyance I might have to encounter if the memories of those old times were raked up again by my officious friends. Don't mention it anywhere, Frances—not to your mother, nor Cecil, nor even to myself. Try to forget I ever said such a thing. I cannot think how I came to trouble you with the story of my old griefs. You won't forget, Frances?"

And Lady Frances, who had been very tired and very sleepy when Mrs. Craven first disturbed her, gave the required promise; and when she was left once more to darkness and repose, found that sleep had been chased from her eyes, as she pondered on the midnight visit which had been paid her.

CHAPTER XI.

MAJOR CRAVEN ARRIVES AT THE COURT.

The next morning the sun was shining gloriously over the Court and its surroundings, and every one was in good spirits once more, and anxiously looking out for the arrival of Cecil Craven from Aldershot. Mrs. Craven had a double reason for longing to see her son again. It was not only that her maternal affection was eager to be gratified with the sight of his face, but she was anxious to be assured that he looked happy and like himself; for of late Cecil's letters had not been written in the same light-hearted, confidential strain that he usually affected. Some of them appeared to have been penned under depression of spirits, although he never hinted at any reason for his being low; and although he had continued to detail all the news of Gibraltar and his regiment, Mrs. Craven felt, whilst perusing them, that something was kept back, and something, also, that was a cause of trouble to himself.

She had fancied too, that his letters during the last few months had been colder than heretofore; less full of inquiries after home and herself; more barren of terms of affection and anticipations of a happy meeting. But if this were true, there appeared little trace of such a feeling in his countenance or manner when Cecil Craven walked into the Court breakfast-room at about eleven o'clock that morning, and returned his mother's embrace of welcome and fond salutation.

If there had been a cause for more constraint in his correspondence with her—a reason for him to feel colder and less affectionate towards her, it melted away before the sunshine of her smile and the warmth of her tears; for, in one sense, Cecil Craven loved his mother more than Raymond Norreys did his, although the latter man had a heart which could burn like fire, and Cecil was almost unimpassioned in his disposition, although where he chose he could be very *fond*. But the secret of the difference lay in the fact that Mrs. Craven had a mind superior to that of her son, and to which his, when brought in contact with it, bowed; and the mother of Raymond Norreys looked up to him for advice, as a woman should look to a man, and was dependent upon him, and he knew it. If Raymond's own mind told him that such and such a course was the right one to pursue, no

earthly power, no opposing intellect, could turn him from it; but Cecil's was a facile temperament, and easily led wrong, even though he desired to do what was right and best.

He had come to Craven Court that morning, not feeling in his heart quite so cordial towards his mother as he had ever felt before, and he had determined that he would show her that it was so, and come to an explanation with her in consequence; but when he saw her handsome, kindly face beaming upon him, and felt the motherly hands caressing his head and figure, his resolutions all faded away, and he returned her greeting as warmly as it was given. His character, compared with that of Raymond Norreys, was doubtless the most amiable of the two — some people might think, the most loveable; but if he possessed the art to attract the affection of others, he had no power to fix it, unless he were aided by adventitious circumstances; whilst Raymond was a man for a woman to love once, to love for himself alone, and to love for ever.

"You will be terribly disappointed, mother," said Cecil, as having shaken hands with Cousin Gus, and received an introduction to Lady Frances Morgan, he turned again to Mrs. Craven; "you will be terribly disappointed, I am afraid, to hear that I must be back at Aldershot to-night. But," he went on to say, not permitting himself to be interrupted by the pantomimic expressions of annoyance and surprise displayed in the countenances of his listeners, "when you know the reason you will dry your tears. I have got my majority, mother, and without purchase, though I wish I could have purchased it a dozen times over, and saved his life instead. We lost poor Arundel coming over."

"What! the Major Arundel you were so intimate with, Cecil?" exclaimed his mother,

"The same, I am sorry to say," he replied; "he was lost overboard in the Bay. The most extraordinary thing you ever heard of; no one knew a word about it till it was all over. It was a lovely night, with a strong breeze on, and we had all been sitting smoking together on the hencoops by the side of the vessel, you know — steamer going then at ten knots an hour. I had walked over to the other side of the poop to speak to a friend, when there was a cry of 'Man overboard!' A boat was lowered immediately, but the captain said from the first there was no chance of saving him, whoever he might be, in such a running sea. Well, after a little, we slackened our speed to let the boat come up with us, which she did, as she went, no trace of the man having been seen, so then the ship's company was called over; they were all right, so then I called over our fellows, and sure enough, poor old Arundel was missing, and has never been seen or heard of, from that time to this. Of course, I had to assume the command at once, and I shall have very little holiday-making until the head-quarters make their appearance. Poor old Jack! his death was hard. Every one in the corps feels it!"

And there was something so like a tear in Cecil's own honest blue eyes as he finished his recital that his listeners all looked very grave.

"And so I stepped into my majority," he went on, after a pause, "and of course I'm glad to get it, though I wish any one else had given it me. I shall be in orders in the next 'Gazette.'"

"Has Major Arundel left any family?" inquired Mrs. Craven.

"Yes; a wife and three children — a very fine woman, too. She will be badly off, I expect, for I don't think she will have anything but her pension to keep herself on."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Craven, compassionately. "Is she young, Cecil?"

"Something over thirty, I believe — by-the-bye, a bosom friend of Rachel Norreys, mother. You haven't asked any questions about your favorite, Dr. Browne, yet. Were you not very sorry to hear of his death?"

"Very sorry," she answered, earnestly, "for we were close friends on, although much separated of late years. Still more sorry for his young daughter left without him. Is she with the regiment at Aldershot, Cecil?" and as Mrs. Craven put the question, she busied herself looking for some work, wherewith to occupy her fingers whilst listening to her son's news.

"She is not," he replied; "her husband, Norreys, arrived at Gibraltar just before we started, and they are coming on [illegible] next steamer."

"I am glad of that," said Mrs. Craven. "I am glad her husband is with her, poor child, she will be happier."

"Yes," said Cecil, "she has few enough to care for her, God knows! *fatherless* and *motherless* — poor Rachel!"

"What is Raymond Norreys like?" asked Cousin Gus. "I knew his father many years ago. We were young men together, and had many an escapade in company. Fine fellow he was, too, by Jove! What is his son like?"

"A fine fellow, also, from the little I saw of him," replied Cecil. "A small man rather, but with a bright, clever face, and very winning manners; a man, I should think, to make his wife happy."

"I thought so," returned Cousin Gus, rubbing his hands together. "Just what his father was, by Jove. He's the fellow to make her happy. I knew it; I knew it long ago;" and Cousin Gus appeared quite excited as he walked up and down the room, rubbing his hands, and saying, at intervals, that he "knew it all along." The mention of the son of the companion of his early days, had waked up old memories from their store, and carried him back to those times, until he felt almost young again.

But it must not be supposed that Cecil Craven had all this time been neglectful of the charms of Lady Frances Morgan. The young lady was no stranger to him by name, for his mother, in pursuance of that great plan whereby these two were to be made one, had filled her letters to Gibraltar with glowing descriptions of the amiable qualities and personal charms with which her young friend was endowed. And, for a wonder, Cecil Craven, with such descriptions fresh in his mind, still did not feel disappointed when he saw the original; for there was something very taking about Lady Frances Morgan, particularly to a man who had seen a good deal of life. There was an air of repose about her fair placid features; an appearance of innocence and freshness about her, which would be very pleasant to see always at one's own hearthstone, and to feel one had ever to turn to when the outer life and pleasures had wearied and sickened the heart. There are women in this world who are content to be so considered; who see nothing galling in being "turned to" when excitements more engrossing fail, and pursuits more solid weary; and long may the race be kept up, for there will always be men who are the better for such resting-places. There is another genus of the same sex, who show their power by preventing the sickness and weariness from ever making its appearance; but all are not so gifted, and the next best thing to prevention is certainly cure; and Lady Frances belonged to the former class. She had no idea of argument, and few powers of persuasion, even for the right, but she had a short, sweet memory for wrongs received, an easy judgment for offences committed, and full ripe lips ever ready to seal the forgiveness she was so quick to bestow. And to read all this at a glance in her fair facile face, and even in the tranquil disjointed play of her dimpled white hand, was as easy as to test the truth of the assertion.

Lady Frances, on her part, was just as favorably impressed with her first view of Major Craven, for, as it has been stated, she had already thought a great deal of him, and the chances of his falling in love with herself, and her foolish little heart was quite ready to succumb.

She was the eldest daughter of the late Earl of Riversdale; and her mother, the Countess, having been left with very inadequate means to keep up her exalted station and educate her family of daughters, it was pretty generally known that no reasonable offer would be refused for the hand of that young lady. Indeed, so many county squires, and younger sons without sufficient to support themselves, had already put in their claims, that the Countess of Riversdale was quite thankful to get her daughter out of the way, under the safe chaperonage of Mrs. Craven, not being without an eye herself to the coming home of the handsome and only son with the liberal income. And for that reason Lady Frances Morgan, who had seen very little society in her own county since her father's death, and to whom the gaieties of Craven Court almost ranked as dissipation, was permitted to visit at her friend's as often as she pleased, and Mrs. Craven and the Countess of Riversdale corresponded together about their "dear Frances" and their "dear Cecil," and understood each other's plans perfectly well, and were equally anxious for the success of their issue.

course Cecil was made a great deal of for that day, and as he promised to return as soon as he could get leave, and make a long stay at the Court, a great many plans were laid for enjoying the summer weather by means of picnics, fêtes champetres, and boating excursions.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Craven, during one of these discussions, "perhaps Mr. and Mrs. Norreys may be of our party then. I shall ask them to stay here, Cecil, as soon as they return to England."

"Shall you?" he replied, but almost curtly. "I don't think they'll come."

"Why not?" inquired Mrs. Craven, with surprise.

"Rachel is not like other girls," said Cecil, evasively; "and she is unhappy just now about her—about Dr. Browne, and, I fancy, will try and shut herself up."

"Oh, I hope not!" put in Lady Frances. "I am so anxious to know Rachel Norreys. I am sure I should like her so much, because Mrs. Craven has told me so many things about her when she was in England." (For, Rachel, when a girl at school, had, in consequence of Dr. Browne's intimacy with the Cravens, paid several visits to Craven Court, and had been made much of whilst there.)

"Have you spoken of her?" said Cecil, looking across Lady Frances to his mother. "I am glad to hear that. I am glad to think Rachel is not quite forgotten by you: I confess I have thought she was."

"Why, Cecil?" demanded Mrs. Craven, eagerly. "Why should you have thought so? Have I ever said as much? I continued my correspondence with Dr. Browne, up to the time of his death, and received my last letter from him only a few days before I heard the news."

"Did you? I had imagined otherwise, that is all."

She appeared about to press the point, but something in Cecil's face stayed the words upon her tongue, and some remark from the unconscious lips of Lady Frances, diverted her attention. Not only hers, but his, for the girl was quite ready to be flirted with, and her cavalier was quite ready to flirt with her. They were in the garden, and in the exchange of compliments and badinage, the young people seemed to be such excellent company for one another, that the mother slipped away unseen, and left them together.

So pleasantly indeed did their conversation wile away the summer afternoon for Lady Frances and Cecil Craven, that the first dinner-bell had sounded before they thought of returning to the house. As they entered it, Mrs. Craven met them, looking weary, and as if she had been waiting to see them again.

"I thought you were *never* coming," she said, as they gained the hall.

Lady Frances blushed and looked timidly at Cecil, and murmured something about having had no idea it was so late; and he stood up for her as a lover should do, and said, firstly, that it was his fault that they had been so long, as he had refused to let his companion know the time when she demanded it; secondly, that he had never looked to see how it went himself; and, thirdly, that he didn't consider that it was late. For all of which, he received bright, grateful glances from Lady Frances' bronze-colored eyes, as she tripped past his mother and himself, and made her escape to her dressing-room.

But the weariness in Mrs. Craven's eyes did not disappear with their excuses, and as she followed her son to his apartment it was still there.

"Are you not well, mother?" he inquired, kindly, as she commenced to busy herself about his room, to see that all he required had been provided for him.

"Only a headache, dear; my eyes look heavy, I suppose, don't they? I often have them so in the hot weather." And then, coming closer to him, and looking him earnestly in the face, she added. "What made you think I had ceased to take an interest in Rachel Norreys, Cecil?"

The question was so sudden, and the revival of the subject so unexpected, that Cecil was quite taken aback. He stammered, and reddened, before he had framed an answer, and then broke out with the not unusual phrase, "I don't know, I'm sure, mother; only because I did."

"Listen to me, Cecil." she went on to say, impressively; "don't think such a thing again, or say it, my dear, if you please, either to her or others, because it hurts me to hear it. I shall always take an interest in, and feel an affection for, Rachel Norreys, for her father's sake, if not her own."

At this juncture Cecil turned and kissed his mother.

"God bless you, mother, for saying so," he whispered; "for I love the girl!"

"Cecil!" she almost screamed.

"Hush!" he said, smiling; "not in that way: as a sister,—nothing more."

"Oh! thank heaven!" she murmured; and laying her head upon his shoulder, wept.

"Come, come," he said, soothingly; "don't give way. You have been excited to-day, and it is too much for you. If you knew Rachel as I have done, you would feel how capable she is of attracting one's affection; and she is not happy, mother; her husband is a good-enough fellow, doubtless, and she will come to love him in time, perhaps; but she was married far too young, and she knows it."

"God pity her!" exclaimed his mother, some recollection, perhaps, of her own married life weighing heavily upon her mind. "God help her, poor child!"

"If I thought," her son went on to say, "that in your multifarious cares and engagements you had forgotten Rachel Norreys, forgive me. I ought to have known you better, mother!" And he laid his hand almost compassionately upon the dark hair which still lay upon his shoulder.

"Dr. Browne was one of my earliest friends, Cecil," she said, presently; "one (I need not mind telling you now that he is gone) of my most faithful lovers. I had several offers at that time—" and here the natural vanity of the ci-devant beauty made her droop her eyes; "but I do not think I ever had one made in so sincere a spirit as poor Alfred Browne's, nor the vow of constancy which followed it, kept with so much faithfulness."

"And yet he married," observed Cecil.

Her eyes drooped still lower.

"Marriage is not always accompanied by love," she whispered.

"True, true!" he answered. "I never dreamt of this, mother; it accounts for all the poor doctor's interest in me and in——"

"For his sake," resumed Mrs. Craven, as if she had never broken off the thread of her narrative, "for the sake of one who loved me so dearly, and whose friendship I so much valued, I should be sorry to be accused of want of interest in his daughter—and a child whom he loved so much, did he not, Cecil?"

"Devotedly!" was the reply.

"Poor Alfred," said Mrs. Craven, again, with tears. "How good, how kind, how unselfish he was! God rest his soul! I had intended asking the young couple to stay here, as soon as they conveniently could, after their return to England," she resumed, after a pause; "but you seem to think that Rachel would object to going into society so soon; and yet this household can scarcely be called society; we would be quiet during their stay."

"I said I thought she would object to it," he answered, "and I think so still."

"Will you do me a favor?" said his mother, hastily; "will you go and meet them at Southampton, find out their plans, and, if possible, sound her on the subject?"

"I could go and see them at Brompton," he answered, evasively.

"No, no! at Southampton, because I ask you, Cecil; and bring me word how she is and looks."

"I will, since you wish it," he replied.

The she kissed and thanked him, and said he was her dearest, only boy, and her great comfort. And as Cecil felt her womanly caresses and tears, all the coolness (if there had been any) in his heart melted away again, and he only felt that she loved him better than any one else on earth did.

He was obliged to return to Aldershot almost directly after the

dinner, and, although Lady Frances had emerged from that mysterious dressing-room, robed in a dress which so ravishingly became her, that her admirer felt as though he could never tear himself away; yet the requirements of the service were inexorable, and he had to take his departure again, long before their usual hour for retiring to rest; but left behind him such a bright promise of return — such visions of prospective parties of pleasure — of waltzes upon well-waxed floors to the strains of well-trained bands — of picnics to Virginia Water, and whole days in Windsor Forest — of visits to town, and the fast-fading delights of operas, theatres, and concerts — that Lady Frances had plenty of matter to dream upon until such moment as the dreams should be fulfilled, to say nothing of a certain white rosebud and sprig of verbena which were nestling in her bosom, and which had certainly *not* been gathered by herself.

Life was just then *couleur de rose* for pretty Lady Frances Morgan; why was it not so for every one? But the body re-acts too often upon the mind, and the hot July weather was very trying, and fully accounted for the constant headaches from which poor Mrs. Craven suffered, and the low state of spirits which their pain engendered.

CHAPTER XII.

A RETURN TO ENGLAND.

The transport, containing the relief for the 3rd Royal Bays, had anchored to time, on the morning following the arrival of the mail-steamer at Gibraltar, and the left wing of that regiment, under the command of Major Arundel, had hustled its belongings into boxes, and been hustled itself on board ship, in the space of forty-eight hours afterwards, an incredibly short time, when all that has to be said, written, and done, before some five hundred men and their possessions can be packed together and packed off, is taken into consideration.

Rachel Norreys did not see much of her old friends during this period. All whom she most cared for belonged to the left wing, and they were too busy to call on her, and the consciousness of the unnatural contract which had taken place between her husband and herself made her feel shy of seeking them. Cecil Craven, indeed, came to see her both evenings before they started, and so did Mrs. Arundel, just to say "good-bye," but even then their mouths were full of their own anticipations and doings, and Rachel felt now as if she held no part in them.

Raymond took her on board the transport, too, the third day, to see them start, but they all laughed at the idea of her feeling anything but merry at the brief separation, and so she had to choke back the tears which the circumstances under which they parted would have called forth, and appear as cheerful as the rest. Elise Arundel, indeed, took an opportunity of whispering that she thought her a very lucky girl, and that Mr. Norreys was one of the best looking young fellows she had seen for a long day; and even Cecil Craven appeared quite taken with Rachel's husband, and bade him a most hearty farewell. Poor old Jack was the only one to linger behind the others, as she was preparing to return on shore with Raymond, to wring the girl's tender hand until it ached, as he bid "God bless her!" again and again, and told her how pleased he should be to see her once more at home, little thinking that the home in which they must meet would be one, on which his earthly eyes could never open.

But when Rachel had left them all, at last, and returned to the hotel with her husband, she felt more astray and less at ease than ever. There was a restraint between Raymond and herself, which all his kindness to her could not remove, and he was essentially kind; not like a lover, not even like a brother; he had never spoken of his love — never brought one evidence of his affection or his wrong too palpably before her, nor alluded to the conversation which took place between them the first night they met since the moment it had been concluded. He would not even have kissed her, had

she not, in sheer shame of shaking hands with the man whose name she bore, lifted her face to him morning and evening, and then his kiss fell lightly on her forehead or her cheek — never on her lips. During the two days that elapsed before the mail-steamer from Malta came in, he was all that the fondest and most careful brother could have been to Rachel, without any show of a brother's affection. He waited on her, anticipating her wants; he consulted her wishes in every particular, and only seemed to live to give her pleasure; at the same time that his attentions were so unobtrusive that they bore no particle of reproach in their fulfilment. He was not melancholy, nor bore any signs about him of an injured man; on the contrary, he was very cheerful, and several times left her for an hour to herself, whilst he made acquaintance with the many strollers and sailors on the wharf, with whom he seemed a universal favorite. Indeed, his capacity for making friends appeared perfectly marvellous to Rachel, who, being of a prouder nature herself, though not more reserved, would watch him with astonishment from the hotel window, as she saw him fly from one new acquaintance to another, hail-fellow-well-met with people he had never seen four-and-twenty hours before, and causing every one he came across to catch the infection of his own mirthfulness. And once or twice, when she saw him returning to her side with a slower step (not thinking she observed him) and downcast, thoughtful eyes, she caught herself almost wishing that she had not been the means of destroying the best enjoyment of so gladsome a nature.

But if there was any chance of Rachel wanting his attendance, he was always at her side. Ready to ride on horseback with her in the mornings, with many a laugh at his own want of horsemanship (for what sailor, just come off a five years' cruise, ever rode well?) and expression of admiration for Rachel's firm seat and skillful handling. Ready to drive her out in the evenings, or to consent to be driver, if she liked it better; to appear interested in her old haunts, and the few beauties of Gibraltar; still ready, when they alighted, to take her down to the water side, or to sit opposite to her at a dinner, the trouble of ordering which had not even fallen upon her, and tempt her to eat by every persuasion in his power. But the evenings were the trying times; when the dinner-table was cleared, and the lamps lighted, and there were no longer any active means of making the hours pass away. Then it was that Rachel could not feel in the least surprised if Raymond, after sitting awkwardly for a short while over his solitary wine, would rise and say he was going to have a cigar, unless she wanted him to do anything for her. And she would answer timidly, "No;" and he would stroll away down to the wharf, to the boatmen, to the billiard-rooms; what mattered it? each one of them was kinder to him than herself, and would not reappear, until long after she had laid her tired head upon the pillow, and was asleep, or seemed to be.

But the weary days passed at last, and the mail-steamer came in, and during the short passage to England Rachel was so ill that she saw no one but the stewardess. Four or five times a day, indeed, was that functionary eagerly questioned by Raymond as to the state of his wife's health, and champagne and every luxury procurable was sent into the cabin for her use, but he did not venture there himself. Once, urged by the stewardess, who wondered at the lady's indifference whenever she recommended a visit from her "good gentleman" as likely to cheer her up, he did put his head into the cabin door, and say, "Rachel, is there nothing I can get, or do for you? nothing you can fancy?" but she had shrunk from his sight, answering, "No;" and he thought his presence was offensive to her, and had not repeated the experiment. But on the day they anchored in Southampton Docks, he did run down to her with the glad intelligence that Cecil Craven had come to meet them, and was on board — glad to him, because he hoped it might please Rachel, whom he found it so difficult to please. And it did please her for the moment; she was sitting ready dressed in her cabin, and she came out on hearing it, and ran up the companion-stairs quite lightly. But disappointment awaited her at the top. Cecil Craven had come at the request of his mother, but laden with the intelligence of poor Jack Arundel's sudden and unhappy death, and the news shook Rachel's weakened nerves

excessively. She wept violently, connecting the kindly heart that had ceased to beat in him, with her own tender father's death, and her wish that she was with dear Elise was so often repeated that no one could have helped noticing it. And yet it surprised her and Cecil Craven not a little, when the young husband, having calmed her emotion as well as he could, said quietly, but with evident sincerity — "Rachel, if it would give you any comfort to go to your friend for a few days, I will take you to Farnborough on our way up to London, and leave you there." She almost stared, for she had had no idea that her desire, which had not amounted to a request, would have been treated as such, and complied with; but the notion, once raised in her breast, became quite irresistible, and she eagerly begged that her husband would do as he had said.

"Oh, pray do, Raymond! I feel as if I *must* go to her! Poor Elise; how unhappy she must be! Ah! I can hardly believe it yet. Poor old Jack! How dreadful it appears even to think of!"

"Are you in earnest?" demanded Cecil Craven of Raymond Norreys, as the two men stood rather apart together.

"Yes — why not?" was the reply, "Rachel is very excitable and nervous; if she doesn't see Mrs. Arundel she will probably fret herself into a fever. They seem very much attached to one another."

"Oh, yes! so they are." replied Major Craven; but he did not seem any the more to favor the idea of Rachel going to Farnborough. The fact is, he would have much preferred to see the intimacy between these two ladies lessened by the circumstances which had occurred to separate them; but at present there seemed little chance of it, for when, after getting clear of the steamer at Southampton, they had started in the train and arrived at Farnborough, and he said, before getting out to look after the luggage, "Well, Mrs. Norreys, are you quite determined?" her hurried "Oh, yes! indeed I am!" settled the question for that time at least.

Raymond was about to follow Major Craven, and help in the exercise of his duties, when he felt Rachel's hand timidly laid upon his, and her voice say, "Raymond, you are sure you don't mind?"

It was the first concession she had made to him since they had met; but as they had sped along, and drawn nearer to the place of stoppage, her heart had been misgiving her as to whether she were right in accepting his generous offer, and permitting him to go home to his mother's house without her — more than misgiving, indeed, for she knew that she was wrong; but she was too anxious to have her own way, and too proud to appear to wish to continue in Raymond's company; but, at the close, her heart nearly failed her. "Are you *sure* you do not mind my not going on to Brompton to-night?"

"Quite sure!" he said, cheerfully, "as long as you are satisfied. It makes little difference to me, you know, Rachel," and he caught back a half-escaped sigh as he said so; "and I shall come and fetch you again in a few days. You will not wish to stay longer, I am sure, because my mother might think it strange; and that is to be avoided, if possible."

She almost wished he would burst out into a storm of passion and abuse, and tell her that he hated and despised her — that he would give her, by ill-treatment of some sort, any excuse to feel that she was justified in not admiring his conduct; but this ready compliance with her wishes — and, worse still, this cheerful compliance, though she knew it was assumed — she felt at times was more than she could bear. She only said now, though, "Thank you; you are very good. I will come back again whenever you wish it." And then he had swung himself on to the platform, and gone to assist in the extrication of the boxes she required from the general mass of luggage.

They had not much of a drive after they left the railway station, for Mrs. Arundel and her children were in lodgings close by in Farnborough; and when they had arrived at the door, Raymond Norreys kissed his wife, and drove back again to the station to continue his journey by the next train to London. He sympathized in the awful event that had made Mrs. Arundel a widow and her children orphans, but he felt he had no business within that hall-door; he would have been sadly out of place whilst the bosom friends were sobbing and embracing; and even Cecil Craven's entreaty that

he would go into camp with him, and receive the hospitality of the 3rd mess, lost its weight, because he could not forget that his mother knew the day they were due at Southampton, and would fret still more at the delay in his re-appearance than she had done at the brevity of his previous visit. The cloudless sunshine with which the July day had been ushered in had subsided into a meaningless drizzle by the the time that Raymond Norreys rung the bell at the iron gate on the occasion of his second arrival at the Abbey Lodge. The flagged pavement was completely wet, and even the covered pathway looked damp as he walked up it and entered the door of his home, not with the light, firm tread with which he had trod it before, but with a step so measured that Christine never recognized it as her brother's, and started from her occupation with such a cry of pleased surprise as he entered the room, that she woke her mother from an afternoon nap, and put her into quite a fright. In the first hurry of embracing him, and expressing their delight at his return, Mrs. Norreys and Christine overlooked the absence of Rachel; but that could not be long, and presently the expected question came—

"Why, my dear, where is your wife?"

"Not outside?" asked Christine, ready to run anywhere to welcome her new sister. But Raymond laid his hand upon her arm.

"No, dear Christine; she is not there. Rachel is not with me, mother. I left her at Farnborough."

"At Farnborough, Raymond?"

"Yes," he replied. "The regiment met with a sad loss coming over, in the death of Major Arundel, and his widow is a very intimate friend of my wife—in fact, just like her sister. Major Craven met us at Southampton this morning with the news, and it quite upset poor Rachel; and, naturally, she wished to go to her friend and comfort her, if possible. So I left her at Mrs. Arundel's, at Farnborough, as we passed the station; and I am going to fetch her again in a day or two; and that is all. And now, mother, give a fellow something to eat, for I have had nothing to eat since breakfast this morning."

He talked fast and gaily, in order to cover the awkwardness of making such an announcement to his relations, but they saw that his manner was assumed.

"I am very sorry to hear of Rachel's distress," said Mrs. Norreys, in her measured tones; "it is sad coming home for the dear girl, and I dare say she felt it to be so; but I wish she had just come on to the Lodge for one night first, that we might have seen you together before she gave up her time to her friend. For, after all, the nearest friend can give little comfort in such bereavement."

Raymond thought his mother would not have derived much gratification from seeing them together, but his sole desire in his answer appeared to be to lift the onus of Rachel's defection from off her shoulders to his own.

"It was my fault entirely that she stayed at Farnborough—my wish, in fact. Rachel has a very tender heart, and fretting would have done her no good. She will be the better for having seen Mrs. Arundel, and talked over this grief with her."

Then he changed the subject to that of the journey home, and described the discomforts of a mail-steamer, but he did not once touch upon Gibraltar itself, nor the circumstances of his visit there.

"But what I want to know," said his mother, as later they sat around the dinner table, "is, what you thought of Rachel when you first saw her, Raymond. Did you find her altered?"

"Not much grown," he answered; "but more womanly, certainly."

"But in her face, Raymond?" urged his sister.

"I thought her face altered at first," he said, "but not afterwards, when the old expression began to play about it. She has the same beautiful changeable eyes she ever had, and the delicate little nose and mouth——"

"The same *loving* eyes, I hope, Raymond," observed his mother.

"Ten times more so, you mean, mamma," said Christine, laughing. "Alick and I will have to play second fiddle when *this* pair of lovers are reunited once more."

Raymond's eyes were grave, and his mouth did not relax into a smile.

"We will yield the palm to Scotland, Chrissy," was all he said.

But his mother remarked his avoidance of the subject, and wondered at it.

"Does Rachel play or sing now?" said Christine; "for the last time she came to Brompton she would do neither, and said she hated both."

"I really don't know," stammered Raymond; "I do not think we once started the subject of music."

"Had something better to talk about," she returned, archly.

He flushed over brow and cheek.

"Now I come to think of it, there is a guitar-case amongst the luggage," he said. "You must make Rachel herself account for its appearance, Christine, when you meet."

"How long did you say your wife was likely to stay with her friends?" demanded Mrs. Norreys. There had been a coldness in her voice whilst speaking of Rachel during the last half hour that roused in his wife's behalf the husband's jealous nature.

"She will stay as long as she has any inclinations for staying," he said, determinately. "I shall run over and see her the day after to-morrow, and if she is not quite ready to come home by that time, I promised Craven to look him up at the camp, where he can give me a shake-down till Rachel can return with me,"

Then Mrs. Norreys knew, slight as the circumstance was, that the actions of her daughter-in-law were not to be canvassed before her son, or there was a chance of her losing them both. So she artistically changed the theme, and spoke of Dr. Browne's death (the news of which had been sent them before in a letter, carried by some friendly hand in the 3rd Royal Bays), and of the probability of a long stay on shore for Raymond, which last was a pleasant theme enough.

"I shan't remind the old birds at the Admiralty of my existence," her son said with regard to it; "and they are hardly likely to remember me, without—though if a good chance offered itself, it would not do for a poor lieutenant to refuse to take it up, or they would be for scratching my name off the list. However, we will not speculate on what may never happen, mother. I have just come off a long spell of duty, and I hope now I may reasonably look forward to a year or two of pleasure to make up for it." But even as the words left his lips, he sighed to think how different a coming home he had looked forward to. But when, upon the meal being ended, and Mrs. Norreys, for some household reasons, absent, Raymond found himself alone in the drawing-room with his sister, he commenced to attack her immediately upon the coolness of his mother's tone when she spoke of his wife.

"My mother speaks as if Rachel was to blame for staying in Farnborough, when I particularly told her it was by my wish that she did so. I cannot have any of my wife's actions questioned, Christine."

"I don't think mamma intended to question them," said his sister timidly.

"It sounded like it," he replied. "Rachel has been in great distress lately, Christine, as you know, and she is young and not used to trouble. If, on her arrival here, she would rather keep to herself (shut herself up, as you would call it), I hope she will be permitted to do so, without comment made or surprise expressed."

"Oh, Raymond!" said Christine, hurt at the tone he had assumed, "you speak as if you had any need to caution mamma and me against being unkind to Rachel."

"No, Christine, I didn't mean that," he said; and he put his arm fondly round her as he spoke, for he saw the tears stand in her eyes; "I am sure you will both receive her kindly; but my mother is old, you see, and particular—strait-laced in her ideas, in fact, and my wife has been brought up in a different school altogether. She has been very much spoilt by her late father (and you will acknowledge when you see her how hard it must be not to spoil her), and used to have her own way in everything, and I am afraid all the rules that are observed here—the strictness about early rising, and prayers and meals, will put her out at first, and she will feel them to be irksome.

"Mamma will wish Rachel to do exactly as she pleases, I am sure," said Christine, gravely.

"It is not only that," he rejoined, petulantly; "of course she will act as she pleases, but I will not have her actions talked about. She is a wild, impetuous, beautiful little creature, Christine, but she is wayward at times. She has a will of her own, as everybody worth caring a snap about has, and I want you and my mother to remember that, and to let her be free, free from other's comments as well as from other's ways. You have influence with your mother, Christine; tell her this from yourself and in other words; make her see the sense of it before she meets Rachel, and everything will go right."

Christine sighed, but she pressed her brother's hand and promised him obedience. At this juncture the drawing-room door was opened, and a head thrust in, the owner of whom seeing the confidential position the brother and sister had assumed, as quickly withdrew it, and closed the door again.

"Who was that?" said Raymond.

"Only Alick," answered Christine; "he generally comes in of an evening when he is disengaged. He sees we are talking together, and does not wish to disturb us — go on, Dear Raymond."

"I have not much more to say," he answered, "and will not keep you from him long — only this, Christine, that to your sisterly love and tenderness I commend my wife. If you have ever cared for me, thought of me, and prayed for me (as I know you have), extend to Rachel, for my sake, the same consideration. She is so dear to me, Christine, that I would shed the last drop of my blood to see her happy and contented; she is so much my darling, that to gain for her affection and esteem I would give up my own worldly share of it, and I look to you to give me pleasure in this respect. You are of the same sex, the same age, probably with the same or very similar pursuits; and, above all, I have made you sisters. No one could be better fitted to be to Rachel what neither she or yourself have ever possessed before. Be her sister, Christine — her loving, confidential friend. Let her always have your sympathy to rely upon, your bosom to turn to, when she requires them, either in trouble or in joy."

"She shall!" exclaimed Christine, fired with a spark from his enthusiasm; "but, Raymond, what are you to be? This is what Rachel should look for in your heart."

He started at the question, and was at first silent: then, summoning up his courage, he replied —

"I, Christine! I shall lie at her feet for a lifetime, and worship her!"

He did not say what she would be to him, or he to her; but his auditor was young, and did not notice the omission.

"You love her very much," she said, softly. "How dearly she must love you in return."

He rose hastily, but stooped again to kiss her.

"God bless you, dear Christine!" he said, "for your faith, and for your promise. Never part with either as you value my affection. Now I must not keep you any longer from Mr. Macpherson, or he will not bless the day which gave me back my sister." And he took her hand, and raised her from the low stool upon which she had been sitting. But when they looked for Mr. Macpherson in the dining-room and study, he was not to be found.

"Mamma!" shouted Christine, from the foot of the stairs, "have you seen Alick?"

Mrs. Norreys emerged from her own bedroom. "No, my dear," was her answer; "I have seen no one. I was just coming down to seek you."

Then the servant was questioned, and he also denied having seen anything of Mr. Macpherson that evening. But, on a second examination of the dining-room, a scrap of paper was found on the mantlepiece, twisted into the form of a note, and addressed to Christine. The words in it were few: —

"I had come to pass the evening with you, but, as you seem better engaged, I have changed my mind, and am going to the Adelphi instead. *Good night!* "Yours, "A. M."

The girl stamped her foot as she read it, and then tore it up, and threw the fragments into the waste-paper basket.

"What is the matter?" asked both her mother and brother.

"Nothing of consequence," was her reply. "Alick had an engagement this evening, and could not wait long. He wrote me a few words to say as much."

She laughed lightly as she told them so, but her heart was anything but light. This constant show of temper on the part of her lover — this incessant petty jealousy — this little, mean system of reproach — where was it all to end?

Christine Norreys loved Alick Macpherson with all a woman's untiring devotion, but she had already commenced, when esteem was spoken of as an essential ingredient to lasting love, to shirk the subject even to her own heart, or to cry out that the saying was untrue.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WIDOW ARUNDEL.

When Rachel rushed up the little stairs which led to Mrs. Arundel's lodgings in Farnborough, her heart overflowing with sympathy in her friend's distress, and only anxious to pour out its wells of comfort for her need, she certainly met with quite as much reciprocity of feeling as she had anticipated. Indeed, if the grief of a widow can be exaggerated, Mrs. Arundel's, at first sight, certainly did appear to be still more violent than was necessary to the occasion; for as soon as she caught sight of Rachel advancing, her eyes brimful of tears to greet her, she threw herself upon a sofa, uttered a loud shriek, and betwixt a fit of fainting and a fit of hysteria (as if she could not quite make up her mind which to indulge herself in, and so made a cross of the two) conjured some person or persons unknown by turns to shoot her, to bring her poison, or to strike her dead: and so startled and astonished her friend by this unusual reception, that Rachel stood in the centre of the room helplessly staring at her, until Mrs. Arundel, thinking they had both had enough of it, was sufficiently considerate to rise from her position, and fall upon the bosom of her visitor. Then, as the latter was about timidly to suggest a few simple words of consolation such as —

"Dear Elise, I *am* so grieved and sorry for you. We only landed at Southampton this morning; and we came here at once ——"

The new-made widow interrupted her with such a torrent of regrets and sobs and self-commiserations, that poor Rachel felt quite incapable of coping with the violence of such an affliction.

"Oh, my dear child! wasn't he good? — wasn't he kind? — wasn't he sensible? Did ever woman lose such a husband before? Was ever a wretch to be pitied like myself? What shall I do without him, without his guidance, his counsel — his direction?" (which, considering that poor old Jack, far from guiding, directing, or counselling any one of his household, had not even been permitted to do the same offices for himself, *did* strike Rachel, even in a moment like the present, as rather a ludicrous idea.) "And left alone, too, a poor weak creature, as I am, used to the protection of another (and such another! oh, Rachel!) with those *dear, sweet, fatherless* children to look after, and think for! Oh, Rachel! think of those fatherless orphans! Ah! what a thing it is to be a widow!"

In the excitement of her grief, and the difficulty of choosing sufficiently powerful phrases by which to express her feelings, Mrs. Arundel appeared to have totally forgotten her French and Italian, and to have forsworn any but her mother tongue. But the real cause of the omission was that her hack sentences had been culled for the necessities of polite society alone, *not for* occasions like the present; so, not having any on hand that would *have suited the difficulty*, with feminine tact she dropped them altogether.

This kind of scene went on for a long time, for the two women were

alone; but when Mrs. Arundel's tears and sobs, self-reproaches and condolences, had a little subsided, and Rachel ventured to broach another topic, and to suggest that she had come with the intention of staying a couple of days or so in Farnborough, the thoughts of the widow took another turn.

"Oh, my dearest creature! how good of you; how like yourself! but I am sure I don't know where I shall put you."

This was a view of the case that had not occurred to Rachel, and she looked nearly as dumb-founded as her friend.

"I didn't think of that," she stammered. "I quite forgot, Elise, that you would be in lodgings: I am afraid I shall inconvenience you."

"Oh! not at all, my dear," was Mrs. Arundel's response, although it sounded conventional; "the only thing is, you musn't mind putting up with me for a night or so, and Emily," (that was Mrs. Arundel's eldest child) "must sleep on the floor; we have only two bed-rooms here, dear Rachel. Even Caroline is gone into the married quarters with her husband for the present, but she comes up in the daytime to look after the children."

It was not pleasant to share the stuffy and not over well-furnished little bed-room which Mrs. Arundel inhabited, nor to feel that in order to enjoy that privilege poor little Emily was unceremoniously turned out upon the floor; but Rachel had invited herself, and there was no help for it, at all events for a night or two. But as the day went on, she felt, in many other things, that she was sadly in the way. Mrs. Arundel, widowed, in second-rate apartments, and just come off a journey, was a very different person to Mrs. Arundel, the wife of the major of the 3rd Royal Bays, and in possession of one of the prettiest houses at Gibraltar. The rooms were small and inconvenient; the dinner provided was scanty, and not of the daintiest order (a guest not having been expected); the children, three in number, and two of them boys, of an awkward, mischievous age, were constantly in the sitting-room, whilst their mother was as constantly out of it, conferring with Caroline Wilson, fighting with the lodging-house woman, or vainly endeavoring to find some article not yet unpacked, or to reduce the chaos of the sleeping apartments into something like order. So that Rachel, sitting in company with the children, or lying, when day was ended, by the side of her friend, trying in vain to extract sleep from the combined aids of a July night and a feather bed, wondered, more than once, if the obligation she had put herself under to Raymond, in accepting his permission to stay at Farnborough, had been worth the gain she had derived from it. She had come with the laudable and affectionate desire to try and comfort her friend under the violence of so dreadful a shock as Rachel thought her bereavement must have caused her. But after that first outburst of evtravagant and overdone despair, the "friend" seemed to be too much occupied with her boxes, and her dinners, and her landlady, to have any time to spare for receiving comfort. Indeed, when Rachel began to study her a little more leisurely, she appeared very much the same as she had always done before; and it seemed to her friend that it was only when Mrs. Arundel was a little cross, or a little tired, that her mind reverted to her "irreparable loss," and that she treated Rachel to another but smaller edition of her hybrid attack. Once the wife thought of writing to her husband, to tell him to fetch her; once even of following him, and giving her own reasons for the act: but each time the fear that he might misconstrue her motive into a desire to rejoin himself, rose uppermost, and prevented the accomplishment of her thought. It was on a Tuesday he had left her there; on Thursday, at latest (so she argued,) he would come to fetch her thence, and she would be ready to go. Elise, indeed, strengthened her in this resolution by her own expressed astonishment at Rachel having stayed at Farnborough before she had visited her husband's family.

"Such a charming fellow, my dear! how you can part with him for a day, I can't think! Why, half the women you meet would give their eyes for such a husband. I really shall begin to quarrel with you, if you don't appreciate him better Fancy letting the poor dear man go home by himself; I'm quite ashamed of you, petite."

"But, *Elise,*" faltered Rachel, "to come to you, and at such a time; *Raymond himself* was anxious I should stop here."

"Ah, mon Dieu! yes," exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, gradually rising into the shrieking stage. "Such a time, indeed! Oh, Rachel! may you never know what such a loss is—such an *irreparable* loss."

And the widow ground the last adjective through her teeth as if she had gravel in her mouth, and thereupon showed such strong symptoms of the hybrid coming on, that her listener hastened to change the subject. She said that she thought that Mr. Norreys intended fetching her away on Thursday, when she should be ready to return with him; and Mrs. Arundel did not press her to stay any longer. She seemed too occupied with plans of her own, but what such plans were Rachel had not been able to learn. She naturally supposed that, widowed as she now was, and having no further reason for staying in the vicinity of the 3rd Royal Bays, Elise would leave regimental quarters and settle somewhere near her own or her husband's friends, wherever they might be. And she broached the question to her, and asked whereabouts she now thought of residing. But Elise Arundel invariably put her off. At one time she had really not decided yet—it was impossible for her to tell: at another, she had her husband's family to consult before making any plans for them or herself; and therefore Rachel of course pressed the question no further. And yet Caroline Wilson appeared to be in the confidence of her mistress, for the two were constantly whispering together, and making such remarks as, "Have that box directed, Caroline; you know where it is to go:" or, "Shall I pack the black box, ma'am; the one which is to remain here?" and so on;—confidences in which Rachel felt she had no share, and feeling so, was wounded to the quick. On the second day that she was at Farnborough, Cecil Craven walked in to see her. She was alone in the sitting-room, or nearly so, Mrs. Arundel's youngest child, a boy of seven years old, being her only companion. She flushed with pleasure at his entrance, and rose hastily to greet him; and as he took her hands in his, he bent and kissed her. She had never felt so glad before to see him—to read the proofs of his affectionate interest in her in his eyes, or feel them in the pressure of his hands. Her whole heart went out in her answering look, as she exclaimed—

"Dearest Cecil, how glad I am to see you!"

"And I also," he replied: "I am very hard worked just now, and have only been once over to the Court; but I thought it would be strange if I didn't contrive to snatch a few hours from duty to see—you." And then he bent his mouth to her ear, and whispered the rest of the sentence, for Mrs. Arundel's little boy was gaping and gazing at their proceedings; and Rachel colored and smiled, and cast down the long lashes to shade her beaming eyes, and looked very happy and very pretty.

"I was at Craven Court last week," commenced Cecil again; and then, observing the child's eyes still fixed upon them both, he deliberately rose, and taking the boy by the shoulder, put him outside the door, and closed it. "Come, my lad," he said as he dismissed him, "you go to Caroline, there's a good child." And then reseating himself, went on, "I was at the Court last week, Rachel, and my mother spoke a great deal to me about you." The girl's crimsoned face was lifted to his inquiringly, and almost with alarm. "You don't distrust me, do you?" he said reproachfully. "No, Rachel; she was very anxious to learn all about you and your husband. It was she who asked me to meet yon at Southampton yesterday; and she wants you and Norreys to go and stay at the Court as soon as you conveniently can."

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed, shrinking from him. "No, Cecil, I couldn't. Don't ask me."

"I don't ask you, dear," he said. "I would be the last to urge you to do anything repugnant to your feelings; but you have done so before, Rachel, and think of it my dear,—that is all."

"I couldn't," was all she replied; "indeed, I couldn't."

"It is a hard case to decide, in which there is no question of duty concerned," he said presently, "especially when it is her brother. But follow *the dictates* of your own will, Rachel. You are too generous a nature, *to let it lead you* very wrong,—too full of pity for the misfortunes of *others, to let your inclinations* bias your charity."

She played with the hand which held her own, and was silent for a time; then she said softly, —

"I *will* think of it, Cecil."

"What about *her*?" he demanded presently, intimating Mrs. Arundel, by pointing his thumb towards the sitting-room.

"How do you mean?" said Rachel, almost laughing.

"What is she going to do with herself?"

"That I cannot tell you," she replied, becoming earnest. "I am very anxious to know myself, and have tried to find out from dear Elise; but I do not think she has decided upon any plan at present."

"Well, I hope the report that I have heard concerning her is not true, — that's all."

"What is it?"

"That she intends settling down near Craven Court. My mother writes me word this morning that the lease of a little place, called 'Laburnum Cottage,' close to the Court gates, is being treated for. by a widow lady of the name of Arundel, and wants to know if it is the same person. My mother appears quite anxious that it should be. She imagines our friend here to be a widow indeed, — up to her eyes in crape and bombasine, and a walking text-book. She'll find herself rather mistaken if they should happen to meet."

"Oh, Cecil!" exclaimed Rachel, "you haven't been setting Mrs. Craven against poor Elise, I hope, nor saying any of the wicked things about her that you used to give vent to occasionally at Gibraltar?"

But before he could reply to this question, the lady under discussion entered the room, looking very stout and hot, in her close black dress and jaunty widow's cap, and rather perturbed in her temper. Major Craven had not honored her with a visit yet in her Farnborough lodgings, and she was annoyed at his coming to see Rachel as soon as she arrived; added to which, the little boy, having considered himself injured by his untimely expulsion from the sitting-room, had rushed open-mouthed to his mamma with the information that "Captain Craven had come and kissed Mrs. Norreys, and put him out of the room because he looked at them;" so that she had considered, for the credit of the house, that it became her duty to put a stop to such proceedings. Even as she entered, Rachel's hand still hung in Cecil Craven's, and she hastily withdrew it with a blush, and rose to make room for her friend on the sofa.

"Pray, don't disturb yourself, my dear," said Mrs. Arundel, ensconcing herself in an arm-chair on the other side of the room, and commencing to fan violently. "I am sorry to interrupt your little *tete-a-tete*, but really I could not stay in the bedroom any longer."

"Why didn't you come in before, Elise?" said Rachel.

"Oh, my dear child, I knew better, of course, than not to let you have a few minutes alone with such a *particular* friend as Captain Craven — *Major* Craven, I beg his pardon." And the tone with which the widow bestowed her dead husband's title on the newly made major was a sarcasm in itself.

"Norreys is coming for you to-morrow, I believe," said Cecil to Rachel, wishing to change the subject.

"Yes," interposed Mrs. Arundel, without permitting Rachel time to answer the question. "Is she not a naughty girl, Craven, to run away from a charming young husband like that, before he has rejoined her a fortnight? I would have turned her out of my house yesterday, and packed her after him, if I had only known it in time." And Mrs. Arundel shook her fan at Rachel with an archness that was very unpleasant, because it only seemed half playful.

"Well, Mrs. Norreys only came out of consideration for you," said Major Craven, rather curtly.

"Oh, I know that, the dear creature," replied Mrs. Arundel, fearful she had gone a little too far. "I know her devotion to me, and glad indeed I was to have her, — wasn't I, dear Rachel? Such a comfort as she has been to me!"

Rachel did not exactly see in what way; but she smiled at her friend, and said, "*I hope so*, dear;" and then, turning to Cecil, continued, —

"*I had a note* from my husband this afternoon, and he told me,

should not be ready to go to Brompton to-morrow, to send him a line; but I have not written, and therefore he is sure to be here."

"About what time?" asked Cecil.

"I do not know," she said; "I never asked him."

"I am sorry for that—I should like to have seen him again. However, it will not be long before I look you up at Brompton. And now I must be off to the camp again. Good-by."

This farewell was directed towards both the ladies; but when he had left the room, and descended half the stairs, he called out, in rather an unceremonious manner, "I say, Mrs. Norreys."

Rachel was standing at the moment, and she left the room directly to see what he wanted with her. As she did so, Mrs. Arundel looked after her, and positively trembled with passion.

"[illegible] in my house," she said to herself. "He may carry on as he likes with her elsewhere,—it was all very well at Gibraltar; but things are altered for both of us. I have borne a great deal from you, Cecil Craven; but I will not be insulted under my very eyes, and keep silence."

But all he had said to Rachel was,—"Don't forget the Court,—think about it,—for *my* sake;" and she had answered, "I will,—trust me," and returned to the side of her "bosom friend" again.

That evening was not a very pleasant one to either of them. Mrs. Arundel was sulky, or something very like it, and Rachel pre-occupied and thoughtful. She was glad when it was time to go to bed; still more so when the sun rose again, and it was time to get up, and put the few articles she had used into her box, and await the coming of her husband. He arrived during the morning, earlier than she had expected him; but she was ready to go.

"Quite sure, Rachel?" he asked. "I can go on to the camp (Craven asked me to look him up), and give you another day with Mrs. Arundel if you particularly wish it."

And her foolish pride had risen uppermost, and she had almost let herself in for another day of torture; but good sense came to her aid and prevented it. She did, indeed, check the glad look of surprise which mounted into Baymond's face when she first denied any wish to stay longer at Farnborough, by laying the absence of her desire to the want of accommodation in the lodgings.

"I am putting Elise out, I can see," she said; "so I had better go to Brompton."

"Yes, I think you had, in that case," he answered; "but I am sorry for your disappointment, Rachel." Why did she not do, then, what her natural honesty dictated? Why did she not tell him at once that she was not so comfortable there, or so happy, as she expected to be at her own home? Because her pride set itself against her honesty, and knocked it down. This conversation took place at the lodging-house door, where Raymond having refused to go up-stairs, Rachel had run down to speak to him. He was still diffident of intruding upon the sacredness of the widow's privacy, and had had no intention of being beguiled into the house; but when, on his refusing his wife's request to that effect, Mrs. Arundel, in all the pomposity of her weeds, appeared herself in the passage to urge, with many beaming smiles to back her entreaties, that he would walk up-stairs, she positively astonished Raymond into compliance. So he did as she desired, and spent a most uncomfortable half-hour with her in the hot little sitting-room, which had no blinds to its windows, and was furnished throughout with scarlet worsted damask, whilst his wife was putting on her walking apparel, and having her box corded by the dirty lodging-house servant. However, it was over at last. Rachel was ready to start. Raymond had altered several of his opinions concerning the state of mind of newly-made widows, and there was nothing to detain them longer.

"God bless you, my darling Rachel!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, exhibiting a great degree of fervor now the hour of parting had arrived. "Good-bye, my sweet, sweet girl! I don't know what I should have done without *you, dearest. Oh, the* comfort your dear wife has been to me, Mr. Norreys. *I sorely grudge* giving her up to you again." And poor Raymond, *easily gulled by the* lady's apparent enthusiasm, bowed and smiled, and in

himself was not at all surprised that any one should be sorry to part with such a friend as Rachel, and only gave a secret sigh to the thought that another held so firm a hold upon the heart he would have given worlds to know his own.

As soon as the husband and wife were fairly gone, Mrs. Arundel, tired of acting, turned to Caroline Wilson, the only person with whom she could afford to be natural.

"Well, Caroline," she exclaimed, with a gasp of relief, as she entered the bedroom, where that worthy was busily occupied in packing boxes and sorting wearing-apparel; "they are gone at last."

"Well, ma'am, and I should really think that it was about time, too. However Mrs. Norreys, calling herself a lady, can inconvenience another lady, like yourself, by coming upon her whilst in lodgings, and at such a time of distress and trouble, too, *I* can't think."

"Well, it certainly *was* inconvenient in the extreme," replied her mistress; "but it's over now; and I should think the reason of the visit was pretty plain. I shall not forget yesterday in a hurry. But I shall get into a scrape if I let such things go on here, Caroline. It really *is not* right, you know."

"Right, ma'am!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, whose own youth not having passed entirely *sans reproche* was always virtuously indignant at the bare mention of other people's failings. "I should think not, indeed; for my part I don't understand such goings on, nor don't pretend to. I'm sure what I saw whilst living at the doctor's was enough to make your hair stand on end; and I never should have held my tongue as I have done, if it had not been that Wilson threatened me with violence if I mentioned it to any one but himself. But I know what I know; and Mrs. Norreys, she has put my temper up so often, speaking to me as if I was a dog rather than a Christian, that I should not mind telling of her any day, if the matter could be made worth my while, and be kept a secret from Wilson; for Wilson is a terrible man, ma'am, when his temper is put up."

"A servant must inevitably see and hear a great deal that goes on in a house, Caroline; but when such things are likely to produce mischief in families, they are much better kept to one's self. Wilson is a worthy creature, and his wish for your silence is a right one."

Mrs. Arundel had put on an air of the most rigid discretion as she spoke, and pursed up her lips with becoming propriety; nevertheless she had perfectly made up her mind that Wilson's wish should be disregarded as soon as it should suit her convenience to make his wife speak, and that, perhaps, at no distant day. The waiting-woman read her determination as plainly as if it had been her own secret; but, prudent as she was artful, she made no remark upon the circumstance.

"Of course, ma'am, and such as you must know best. The boxes are ready now, ma'am, and I believe they are all that you intend to store."

"Yes, Caroline; and as you go home this evening, tell the man to send for them to-morrow morning, for I shall be glad to get them out of the house. I will leave word with the woman here to give them to him, because I am going over to Weybridge again myself, and may not be back till late."

"Will the cottage suit, do you think, ma'am?" inquired Caroline Wilson, with the old respectful manner.

"Yes, I imagine so; but the situation is what I am so charmed with—close to the Court, such an advantage; The landlord and I are disputing just now about terms, but I expect that I shall get my own way with him, as I am willing to take the house on a lease."

"Then you are sure the neighborhood will suit you ma'am?"

"Quite sure," replied Mrs. Arundel, and she smiled as she said so. She knew *why* it could not fail to suit her. Why she had chosen it before all other neighborhoods. Because she had a great plan in her head, and till that succeeded, she must live near Weybridge, and when it succeeded, what would signify the lease of a trumpery cottage. But in the meanwhile she kept her plans in the dark, and her own eyes open.

"That will do, Caroline, for this evening," said her mistress, later in the day; "and if Wilson should wish you to stay at home to-morrow, perhaps

you will send up your daughter (that pretty girl is your daughter, is she not?) to have an eye to the children whilst I am away."

"Yes, ma'am, I will. Martha is my daughter, ma'am, and a fine girl, though I say it. I scarcely expected to find her so improved on my return. She was apprenticed to the dressmaking business in London whilst we were at Gibraltar, ma'am. She will be only eighteen next December, but she's very clever with her needle."

"An uncommonly fine-looking young woman," repeated Mrs. Arundel; "and you must be very proud of her, Caroline. Well, then, I shall expect either her or yourself to be here to-morrow."

"Certainly, ma'am; good night." And Mrs. Wilson left the room, her eyes sparkling, and her cheek flushed with the pleasure she had experienced in hearing Mrs. Arundel sound the praises of her Martha. It was the only subject on which you could touch this woman's hard, revengeful, avaricious nature: her love for, and pride in, her daughter was her one vulnerable point.

Her mistress had also her vulnerable point; and though it was not so quickly discernible, it might easily have been guessed at, if the thought with which she settled herself to sleep that night could have been translated into words. For—

"Under his very eyes," her heart said; "almost beneath the same roof-tree; in the path he daily traverses; if I cannot, by all my blandishments and tears throw again over him some of the enchantment of the past, I will at least strive to mar his future. If I cannot have Cecil Craven, I, who have the best right—the right of precedence—no other woman shall!"

CHAPTER XIV.

RACHEL'S NEW HOME.

Although Rachel Norreys was anxious to leave a house where she felt herself so much in the way as she had done at Mrs. Arundel's lodgings, yet, as soon as she was in the train alone with Raymond, the same feeling of blankness and want of ease came over her that she had experienced when in his company before. And then, when she was left behind with him at Gibraltar, there had been a hope, however small, to comfort her, that of meeting her friends again in England. But she had come to England, and she had met them (or one of them, at least,) and she felt thoroughly disappointed at the result. Her hope seemed over—everything seemed over to the young impetuous creature as she leaned back in the railway carriage, which was fast conveying her to the house henceforward to be her home. As she did so, how sad were her thoughts! Every incident that had occurred to trouble her during the last few months seemed to pass in revision before her during that brief journey, and mock her with the irrevocability of its nature. Her father's death—her husband's return—the change in Elise—the loss of her poor old friend, Jack Arundel—and, above all, the weight of a secret which she bore alone—a secret which was bowing down her joyous nature—overclouding the brightness of her young life, making her shrink from others, and even from herself, as if she walked this earth a living lie. These were dangerous thoughts for Rachel to indulge in—doubly so, because her nature was quick, passionate, and determined; and her education had been such that recklessness with her appeared no evil. Her temper, too, with all its normal brightness, was capable, under real or fancied wrong, of dark and sudden clouds, which dimmed its sweetness, and sometimes obscured her very reason. And as she leaned back in the railway carriage and thought upon these things, she was not sulky, but despondent; so much so that life in prospective appeared to have lost all its good for her, and her Maker His great attribute.

Raymond Norreys watched her in surprise. She had seemed at first so *pleased to exchange* Farnborough for Brompton, that he had almost hoped

she had anticipated, however slightly, a return to his company; but now he felt he had deceived himself. Yet even smarting under this disappointment, and little things are hardest to bear with equanimity, Raymond let no symptom of such a feeling escape him by word or look. He allowed his wife to maintain her mood of reserve until he had placed her in his mother's carriage, which was waiting for them at Waterloo Station, and then, as they commenced to drive towards Abbey Lodge, he said to her, kindly and cheerfully—

"You found Mrs. Arundel better than you expected, did you not, Rachel?"

"Yes," she replied, "but it is all very miserable. I don't think she quite realizes her loss yet."

"I dare say not, poor thing," he answered; "you must have felt it too, dear Rachel, both for yourself and for her; but you will try not to let the recollection of it influence you when we arrive at home, will you? My mother is anxiously expecting her new daughter, and it would grieve her so to think you were not happy."

At this address Rachel tried to rouse herself and look more cheerful. She was very unhappy, but she was not selfish, and she felt that she owed something—a double debt, indeed, to the man who sat beside her. She raised herself from her languid position, settled her dress, and gave a slight smile, as she replied—

"What would she feel if she thought that you were not so, Raymond?"

"She cannot think it," he rejoined, quickly, "because it is not the truth. My happiness lies in yours, Rachel. You have it all in your hands. Let me see you contented, and I wish for nothing more."

She turned her face towards the window, and dropped the conversation. She was always afraid to approach any but the most commonplace subjects when she was alone with her husband.

A few minutes more brought them to Abbey Lodge. Rachel remembered the old house and garden well enough, but the covered pathway had been an innovation of more modern date than her visit there.

"How very convenient," she said, as she alighted from the carriage, and prepared to traverse its protracted length.

The remark was simple enohgh, but Raymond felt his foolish cheek grow hotter as he heard it; the smallest praise, the lightest commendation from those lips, for anything connected, however remotely, with himself, made a rebellious hope, which he was daily striving to crush down and destroy, leap like a living thing beneath his breast.

The meeting between the new relatives was commonplace enough, as such meetings under ordinary circumstances usually are. Perhaps Mrs. Norreys and her daughter did not feel disposed to welcome the young wife quite so warmly as they would have done had she returned, in the first place, to Abbey Lodge with her husband; but, if so, they were careful not to exhibit any inclination of the kind. On the contrary, their greeting was cordial, though constrained, as it ever must be when strangers meet as near connections. Mrs. Norreys' first idea, after kissing Rachel, and calling her "her daughter," was to commiserate her for having travelled in the heat of the day.

"I am afraid you must be quite used up, my dear; had you not better lie down for a short time before luncheon is served? I really should not have sent the carriage to the station if Raymond had not made so sure (from not hearing from you this morning) that you would return with him about this time."

"Well, mother, you see it is fortunate that you followed my advice," said Raymond, "or I should have been obliged to rattle Rachel home in a cab, and that would have fatigued her still more. Are you very tired?" he added, addressing his wife.

"Not at all," she answered; "I am only dusty."

"You shall go to your room at once, my dear," interrupted Mrs. Norreys. "Christine, ring the bell, and desire Ellen to take up a jug of hot water to the Blue Room. Come, my dear Rachel, I will show you the way."

And then Rachel was forced to accompany her mother-in-law upstairs

and felt, for the first time on leaving the presence of her husband to go with a stranger, that she left behind her something that was becoming familiar to herself. The Blue Room was a very spacious apartment, with a most dignified-looking four-post bedstead in the centre of it, draped with ample blue hangings, and fitted with solid, old-fashioned mahogany furniture — the best spare room in the house, indeed, and that had been unused now for many a long day.

"I alway resolved," said Mrs. Norreys, when Rachel made some remark upon the surrounding magnificence, "that when dear Raymond married, this room should be given up to his wife and himself, and be considered as their own. And so, my dear, remember," the old lady continued, patting her daughter-in-law kindly on the shoulder, "that, as long as you choose to inhabit it, it is yours. I shall be glad to see it tenanted again; for it has never been used (this with a profound sigh) since Raymond's poor dear father died. He was laid out on this very bed, and no one has ever slept in it since."

Rachel timidly glanced towards the piece of furniture indicated. With her nervous and susceptible imagination, she had the greatest dread of supernatural horrors, and had often made herself quite ill during her lifetime with encouraging foolish fancies and child-like fears. She almost shuddered now, although it was broad daylight, as she looked at the bed where Death had been, and her mother-in-law misinterpreted the doubtful glance.

"My dear child, you need not be afraid that it is damp. *I* have taken good care of that; and I hope you will let me know if everything is not just as you like it. Will there be enough blankets here, do you think?"

"Plenty, Mrs. Norreys," answered poor Rachel, whose feverish little body could seldom bear much clothing of any sort upon it. "Everything is very nice and comfortable, thank you."

"There are plenty of pillows for you," continued the mother-in-law, beating up the articles in question with pride as she spoke; "and if you do not want them all, I know Raymond will: he likes his head very high, doesn't he?"

But Rachel was busy removing her walking things, the warmth of which seemed to have heightened the color in her face, and did not appear to have heard the last remark of her mother-in-law.

"You must look at the dressing-room, my dear, next," said Mrs. Norreys, as she dragged the wearied girl down a small flight of steps into a lesser room adjoining the sleeping apartment, and opening from it. It was a very convenient dressing-room indeed, with a nice writing-table and sofa in it for Raymond's use, and another door which led out upon the corridor. But the young wife's praise was not so cordial as Mrs. Norreys had hoped for, as she pointed out the various arrangements which had been made for her husband's comfort.

"You see, Rachel, Raymond can come here whenever he wishes to write, or to be quiet, and free himself from the chatter of you girls, — though I don't suppose that will be often," added Raymond's mother, gazing with admiration upon the released tresses of chestnut hair which, having become disordered by the removal of her hat, were lying in heavy coils about the youthful shoulders of Raymond's wife.

But at last Rachel grew terribly weary of all this explanatory twaddle. Mrs. Norreys was excessively kind and attentive; but all the little details with which she entertained her, fretted the girl's spirit, already chafed by the circumstances of the morning. She did not leave her for a minute; she accompanied her as she moved from one side of the room to the other. She poured out the water in the basin, handed her the towel, drew down the window-blinds, and, finally, insisted upon her lying down upon the bed where Raymond's father had been laid out, and "taking a sleep" before the luncheon-bell was due. A sleep! — when every nerve in her body was twitching with thrice its usual rapidity, — when she could hear the pulsation of her heart, and scarcely count its beating. As this proposition was urged upon her, Rachel seemed almost ready to break down, and, with a faint remonstrance and a nervous movement of her mouth, she seated herself upon a chair, and Mrs. Norreys could see that she was trembling.

The old lady could not understand the reason, but she saw the fact; and, thinking that her son might be the best doctor in the case, she said, hastily, "Well, my dear, I will leave you to do as you like," and thereupon vanished from the bedroom, and, seeking Raymond, told him that she thought his wife was a little nervous and upset from her journey, and that he had better go up stairs and see what his presence would do for her. Alas! poor Raymond. He advanced a few steps into the passage, and then called Christine.

"Come with me, Chrissy," he whispered; "you women understand each other better than we men can do. Go in to Rachel and cheer her up. This is the commencement of the fulfilment of your promise to me."

"Will you not come also, Raymond?" she asked, in surprise, as he prepared to leave her at the bedroom door.

"No, — thanks, my little sister. You will get on better alone." And he entered his dressing-room as he spoke.

Christine first knocked at the door, then, upon being answered, opened it gently, and went in.

Rachel was sitting as her mother-in-law had left her, despondent and weary; but she raised her head, and tried to smile pleasantly as she saw the bright face of Christine by her side.

The sister of Raymond Norreys had a happy disposition, like his own. She was very warm-hearted, too, and unreserved, and ready to love those who had any claim upon her. She advanced now without ceremony to Rachel, and, throwing her arms about her neck, exclaimed, —

"Dear Rachel, I hope that you will be happy amongst us. I feel as if I must love you, because you belong to Raymond; and you will learn to regard me as a sister also for his sake, will you not?"

The address was so honest, and the speaker appeared so much in earnest, that Rachel Norreys would have possessed a harder heart than she did to have passed it by in coldness. But she had a heart warm as Chrstine's own, and capable of far greater feeling, and the tenderness of her sister-in-law's words opened that wellspring of tears in her bosom which had been longing to overflow for the last hour. She returned the affectionate embrace; she tried to re-echo the sentiments, and give the necessary assurance to the question asked her; but something rose in her throat and choked her, — something that in another moment fell in a violent storm of rain upon the bosom of her new friend.

"Oh, Christine! will you really love me? — *really, really?* I have so few left, — I am so utterly alone!"

It was a strange speech to fall from the lips of a bride returning to her husband's home. Through the closed doors between them Raymond caught the outspoken, vehement words, and bit his lips to hear them. But Christine only answered the first part of the appeal.

"Love you, dear Rachel! How can you doubt it, when we have been looking for your arrival so long? Of course we shall, for Raymond's sake as well as your own."

Ah! that clause repeated. What right had she to take the love they offered her for "Raymond's sake," — for the sake of Raymond "whom she loved," — whom she loved not, — whom she had told she never should love? Would it be honest in her, under false pretences, to accept the regard offered her so freely for the sake of the affection which she bore her husband, when she was no wife of his, — no daughter to Mrs. Norreys, — no sister to Christine, — when even the name she used she had no right to? As these thoughts coursed themselves one after another through Rachel's mind, she gradually relaxed her encircling hold of Christine Norreys, dried the tears still lying on her wetted cheeks, and assumed altogether an air of less freedom, as if she remembered herself, and where she was.

"I have been very foolish, Christine. Pray forgive this outburst, and forget it. It is not a usual thing for me to 'carry my heart upon my sleeve for daws to peck at.'"

The quotation was not complimentary to her consoler, but the kind heart of Christine passed it over without comment.

"But here, dear Rachel!" she said; "you are at home, and can do as *you like.*"

Oh, how Rachel longed to throw herself again upon that friendly bosom, and tell all her sorrow and its cause! But the same thought came into her head that had troubled it before, and laid a restraint upon her tongue.

"Yes, indeed," she said, rising and essaying to bathe her face and arrange her disordered hair, "after all the travelling I have had lately, it is quite pleasant to think that I shall not have to move again. I hate boardship — do not you? and railways also, for that matter."

Christine rose also with a sigh. She had thought her new sister was really going to make a compact of friendship with her; but the moment for confidence seemed to have passed as suddenly as it had arisen. She was sorry for the change in Rachel's manner for Raymond's sake; however, it was unreasonable to hope for anything more than every-day communications from her brother's wife, when she had not been in the house yet for more than an hour. The luncheon-bell soon after sending forth its clamorous invitation, brought the two girls down stairs to the dining-room, where they found Mrs. Norreys presiding over a very plentiful mid-day meal. Everything at Abbey Lodge was conducted on the good old-fashioned style, when in gentlemen's families there was no such thing as stint in any one particular, and nothing appeared on the table or about the house that was not the best of its kind. The silver was silver — heavy, solid, and greatly emblazoned; the linen was damask, and woven by grandmothers and great-grandmothers of half a-dozen generations back. The wine was old, and the servants knew their duties; and as everything spoke of comfort in the same degree, little more need be said upon the subject. The fact being, that Mrs. Norreys had the sense to prefer living within her income and enjoying the good things of this life without limit, to spending more money upon outside show and less upon indoor comfort.

But although there was no lack of luxury about Abbey Lodge, as far as eating, drinking, and living were concerned, another old-fashioned complaint had been inherited by Mrs. Norreys from her progenitors, which, although doubtless perfectly proper, is as doubtless exceedingly irksome to those people who have not been accustomed to it — I allude to a rigid punctuality being maintained on all matters appertaining to the household. Thus the prayer-bell at Abbey Lodge rang at eight o'clock every morning, summer and winter — the breakfast-bell at nine — that for luncheon and dinner at one and six — for prayers again at ten, after which no one — mistress, guest, or servant — was expected to remain out of bed longer than was necessary to disencumber themselves of their mortal clothing. As Mrs. Norreys enlarged over the luncheon-table upon the above rules of her house, for the edification of her daughter-in-law, Rachel listened with dismay to the long, prosy details, and Raymond rightly read the expression of her face.

"All very judicious and proper, mother, I am sure," he said, laughing, "but you are positively frightening my wife with the strictness of your rules; I don't fancy she has been used to such early hours in Gibraltar; have you Rachel?"

"A life in foreign climates is generally a desultory one, my dear Raymond," replied his mother; "but Rachel is not in Gibraltar any longer now, and she will I am sure be quite ready to comply with the regulations of our establishment."

The tone was not unkind, but it was infinitely proper; and the undisciplined heart, for whose edification Mrs. Norreys was holding forth, bounded with a feeling very akin to rebellion as it listened; but its owner had the sense to let it bound in silence.

After luncheon, exactly at three o'clock, the carriage was announced to be at the door.

"This is our hour for driving, my dear," said Mrs. Norreys; "you will accompany us?"

But here Rachel ventured to affirm that she was tired, and would rather stay at home; and her husband scorned the notion of a close carriage.

"No, thank you, mother, I stay with Rachel."

"Very well," said Mrs. Norreys, "it does not signify for to-day. Another time I hope your wife will be pleased to accompany Christine and myself in our afternoon drive."

And then Rachel knew that, hot or cold, wet or dry, that three o'clock drive would be a stereotyped matter of daily discussion between her mother-in-law and herself as long as she remained at the Abbey Lodge.

But her afternoon did not pass unpleasantly. She commenced to unpack her boxes. and Raymond actually ventured to put his head in at the bedroom door, and ask if he should help her, with such a pleasant face, and looking so anxious to be made of use, that she could not have repulsed him. And very useful he was, uncording heavy trunks and arranging their contents in her chest-of-drawers and wardrobe for her; and then having all the empty cases cleared away again, so that her bedroom looked quite home-like and comfortable before Mrs. Norreys and Christine had returned from their drive. And Rachel had sat in an arm-chair the meanwhile, and directed him where to place the various articles; and he had been amusing her with stories of board-ship and sea life, until she was surprised to find herself laughing at his humorous fun, and feeling more cheerful than she had done for many a day past. And then, when her boxes were disposed of, he had brought in one of his own, and unpacked thence a number of the presents he had collected for her with so much care from the different places he had visited abroad. As Rachel saw them laid out upon the bed, and thought how much they must have cost, and how their purchaser must have thought of her wherever he was, her pretty white teeth came firmly down upon her trembling lower lip, as she tried to keep back the tears she was too proud to let him see her shed at this proof of his affection for her. But, do what she would, she could not help comparing his faithful remembrance with her own utter disregard of his feelings, and she felt full of compassion for his wasted love, and of humility for her own short-comings. He did not seem to perceive her mood however, but bundled his offerings out upon the bed, with the usual carelessness of men for finery, thinking little of them himself, and doubtful now, indeed, whether Rachel would think any more, since she could not value them for his sake. Such a miscellaneous heap, too, as appeared when at last they were all collected together.

There were articles in ivory and sandal-wood from Hong-Kong; gauze dresses from Shanghai; carved peach-stone and mother-of-pearl bracelets from Canton; birds of paradise and silver ornaments from Singapore; painted boxes from Burmah; inlaid boxes from Bombay; ostrich feathers from the Cape; coral and lace from Malta; and kind thoughts hovering over each article from everywhere. And when they lay piled upon the coverlet, fans, bracelets, boxes, and card-cases, in one confused mass, all the comment Raymond made upon them, was—

"There they are, Rachel! if you don't like them, throw them away." "Like my love," was in his heart, but he was too generous to say it. As the girl heard his words, she rose from her chair and approached the bed, to admire his offerings.

"They are beautiful; I never saw such a lot of pretty things together before. Thank you, Raymond, so much!" and her husband, being still in a kneeling position on the floor, she stooped and kissed him, as she would have kissed an intimate friend who had given her a present. But at her action the color flew to the young man's face, and he rose hastily from his knees, saying:

"Don't do that again, child—for God's sake!" and left her, surrounded by her new acquisitions, as he spoke.

She was terribly hurt—no less by his words than his manner; and when they next met, felt twice as reserved towards him as she had done before; and he, for his part, seemed almost as if he were afraid that she would repeat the dose, or in some way allude to it. But they did not meet again until it was in the presence of his mother and sister.

CHAPTER XV.

WHAT SHALL HER HUSBAND DO WITH HER?

The dinner passed off very agreeably, and excepting for this fresh reserve springing up between Raymond and herself, Rachel would almost have enjoyed her evening. A hint had been given to Mr. Alexander Macpherson not to make his appearance on that particular occasion, and so they were quite alone. When her husband had left her standing by that mountain of presents, refusing even the thanks she proffered for them, poor Rachel had felt terribly guilty. The same doubt which had attacked her in the morning with respect to the love of her mother and sister-in-law returned upon her now. What right had she, who gave him nothing, to accept all this from Raymond? she, who had wounded his self-love and pride to that degree that he shrunk from her simple kiss as if she were some poisonous thing to sting him. These offerings had been collected for his wife —not for her, who was a dependent on his bounty. As this last thought struck for the first time the girl's proud heart, her delicate nostrils dilated, her breath came quick and hard, and she tapped the ground repeatedly with her impatient foot. It was a bitter truth for a pride like Rachel's to swallow; but she felt it to be truth; and from the hour that it struck home to her heart, she almost loathed the bread she eat and the clothing that she wore.

"I *cannot* wear those dresses," she thought. "I am thankful they are colored; Christine can take them. Did I attempt to put them on, and parade their bravery to the world, they would drop off me where I stood, and reveal me as I am—a fraud! a cheat! a subterfuge! Does Raymond think that I am a beggar, that he thrusts these gifts upon me, and will take no thanks? Why even a beggar thanks for what he asks for, and I did not ask for these. Heaven knows I ask for nothing. Oh, thank God, my father's dead!" And for the moment that remembrance drove out all others from her mind.

"I cannot keep these things," she said at last, decisively though, to herself. "They were not bought for me; I feel I have no claim to them. If Christine will not, at the least share them, I shall do what he suggested, throw them on one side."

And so, after the dinner was removed, and she found herself for a moment alone in the drawing-room with her husband, she said to him, hurriedly, and with an evident effort:—

"Raymond, may I share the things you gave me with Christine? There are too many for me, and you should give your sister something;" and he had answered almost as hurriedly—

"Do just as you like with them Rachel; they are yours to keep, or give away;" and then, as if fearful his words appeared cold, he added, with an appearance of greater interest, "Christine will doubtless be pleased if you give her some of them; she is disposed to think very kindly of you already.

"Thank you, Raymond," she replied, and resolved that her sister-in-law should choose what she most admired from the mass, and that the rest should be put under lock and key, until she felt she had a better claim to them than now.

"And if that time never arrives for me," she said to herself, "some one may come after me for whom it may; for if this kind of thing goes on for long, I believe that it will kill me, and I hope," she added passionately, "that it may."

Christine re-entered the drawing-room, bearing with her the guitar-case which her brother remembered to have seen amongst his wife's luggage. The instrument had been placed in it by other hands than Rachel's, for she had never seen, and scarcely thought of it, since the evening she had sung to it last, at Mrs. Arundel's. The sight of it brought back many a painful memory to her heart; but she was getting used to such trials now, and bore *them better* than she had done.

"*See what I* have found, Rachel," exclaimed her sister-in-law, as she

advanced towards her. "Raymond pleads guilty to total ignorance of whether you sing or do not sing, and refers me to yourself for an answer; but I think this case is a better solver of the question than either of you."

"If it is not empty," said Rachel, quietly.

"We will soon settle that matter," replied Christine, "for I took the liberty of having it opened for you. There, what is that?" she asked triumphantly, as she lifted the lid of the case, and held aloft Rachel's guitar, with all its strings flown and hanging helplessly down from the frets.

Something in its desolate aspect touched poor Rachel more than the sight of itself had done. She took it from the hands of Christine as if it had been a living creature, and the tears rose in her eyes, and dropped thence upon the disabled instrument as she busied herself in restringing it. Raymond perceived the effect it had upon her, and spoke to his sister as if it was all her fault,

"What the deuce do you mean, Christine, by bringing things here before you are asked for them?"

Poor Christine was dreadfully taken aback by this reproof; her brother had never spoken to her like that before, and she thought she had done such a clever thing in finding the guitar-case. Rachel saw her discomfiture, and hastened to relieve it. Good heavens! was she to be the means of disturbance to more members of this family than one?

"It is not of the slightest consequence, Raymond," she said, firmly. "I am very glad to see my guitar again, and very much obliged to Christine for bringing it, only I have not sung to it since, since—"

She did not finish her sentence, but her hearers could guess the rest.

"Oh! forgive me, dear Rachel," exclaimed Christine, "and let me put it back into its case. Another night, when you are stronger—"

"I shall never be strong enough to think of him without pain, Christine. I would rather sing at once, thank you; it is only the first effort that is trying."

And Raymond could not help, as he listened to her, wondering at and admiring the strong courageous spirit which reigned in so tender a breast. When she had tuned her guitar, and placed her fingers on the strings, the first chords they appeared naturally to form were those of the little song she had sung by the request of her friend Elise, on the evening she touched it last, "La Desolazione," and she commenced to sing it. The nature of the song has been described before, and it lost none of its pathos from the interpretation which Rachel's saddened feelings put on it to-night.

Christine, whose musical tastes had been (like all other branches of her education) most scrupulously superintended, and who had not been permitted to have any but the most innocent of songs in her portfolio, was positively enchanted by the combined effect which the wild passionate words of "La Desolazione" and the strains of the guitar had upon her.

The tears were standing in her bright dark eyes as Rachel concluded, and the first thing she said was, "Oh! do sing it again!" And when it was ended for the second time, she turned to Raymond and exclaimed—

"Isn't it lovely, Raymond?"

"Yes; I like it very much," he replied.

He was very susceptible to the influence of music, particularly just at that time, when his spirits were feigned, and he had felt his wife's singing more than he chose to express.

Rachel thought she must say something in reply to this joint approval of her efforts, and so she remarked—

"I think the words are particularly well adapted to the music," and commenced repeating them:—

"'Ritorna, ch'io t'amo, mio primo sospir.
Ritorna, ch'io bramo, vedertie morir!'"

"What are they in English?" asked Raymond; "I do not understand Italian."

"Oh, you goose!" laughed his sister; "they only mean—

"'Return, thou that I love, my first aspiration.'

(I suppose '*aspiration*' would be the word, Rachel?)

"'Return, that I may embrace, see thee, and die!'

Now, what do you think of them?"

"I am no judge," he replied, with a touch of bitterness in his tone. "I have had very little experience of such pressing invitations. I don't suppose people often feel what they sing." And as he spoke, Rachel felt her face crimson with shame at the unintentional reproach, for she knew that he was thinking that very little pathos or passion had been breathed into her longings for his return, whatever her songs might imply. Raymond seemed absent after this little episode, and as if he were wrapt in his own thoughts; and when Mrs. Norreys rejoined her daughters, he rose and sallied forth into the night air, no one knew whither.

The evening went slower after his departure. Rachel sung several more songs, and Christine gave a specimen of her skill upon the piano; and then wine and biscuits appeared, and after that the bell rang for evening prayers, and still the son of the house had not returned. His mother fidgetted at his absence, and wondered at the reason; but Rachel thought that she could guess it plainly enough. However, the bed-time of the inhabitants of Abbey Lodge was never deferred, whoever was from home, and therefore, as soon as prayers were over, Mrs. Norreys and Christine handed Rachel a candlestick, and, taking up their own, bade her an affectionate good-night.

"The man-servant has been directed to sit up until Raymond comes in, my dear," remarked the former, as she saluted her daughter-in law; "in the meanwhile, let me advise you not to permit his delayed return to keep you from your natural rest. Benson, turn off the gas." And thereupon the staid and immovable Benson, with habitual dexterity, caused the whole house, in the course of a minute, to be wrapped in darkness, so that if any one had had a fancy to stay in the sitting-room for a little while longer, they could not have indulged it. But Rachel was thankful for her husband's absence, and flew to her own room, lest she should encounter him again before she had gained its sanctuary. There, by the aid of a pair of tall wax candles, all looked cheerful enough, and she sat for some time thinking over the events of the day, which seemed so many in the retrospect. Presently she heard the hall-door open, and Raymond's footsteps ascending the staircase. He passed her door, and entered the dressing-room, closing his own after him gently, and turning the key. Rachel breathed freer when she heard him do so, although she felt an unaccountable longing just to be able to peep through the door which separated them, to see how he conducted himself—whether his face looked sad, and what he was going to do next. If she had had her wish, much of her prejudice against him would have melted away in womanly compassion for the hurt she had inflicted, and no other could heal. Raymond Norreys had entered his room softly, that his wife might not hear him, and then, taking off his coat and waistcoat, he had thrown himself into a chair, and lying back in it, had crossed his arms upon his breast, and given himself up to thought. As he permitted it to have the dominion over him, an observer might have seen, from the violent and sudden changes that passed over his features, from the knitted brow, the compressed lips, the weary, languid eyes, and the heavy sighs which occasionally escaped him, that the demon that had gotten possession of him was by no means a welcome or a pleasant guest. In truth, Raymond Norreys was considering, now that he had brought the woman he called his wife under the protection of his mother's roof-tree, what on earth he was to do with her. This man was no fool—no weak, love-sick idiot, to be content to fawn all his life upon a girl who did not care for him, without expecting or hoping for a return. He had loved the child whom he had married with more than a boy's love; he had nourished and fostered, during many years, a passion for the creature of his imagination, which, since he had met her again, instead of dissolving itself into thin air, had seemed to grow, out of her very coldness, more vehement every day. But he felt that he had placed himself in a humiliating position by the agreement he had entered into with his wife; he doubted whether he had done his suit any good by that agreement; whether, in a woman's eyes, it might not have appeared to be simplicity, indifference, or a want of determination, instead of an offspring of the generosity from which it

emanated. As Raymond bred this doubt, he grew impatient with himself. He had pandered to none of these; he knew it well. He had every qualification that a man ought to possess; and it had been an innate sense of chivalry which had grown up with him, a great idea of the unequal strength between the sexes, of the consideration due to a woman, especially one who possessed both youth and beauty: it was these feelings alone which had made him so gentle with her. He had passed his word to Rachel that he would never claim her as his wife until she came of her own free will and told him that she loved him. Suppose she never so came. At the bare idea the young man started in his chair and ground his teeth together. He had gained a little more insight into her character since that first interview; she was very thin-skinned and sensitive, he could see that — proud as Lucifer — and determined as well as proud. Suppose her pride should never permit her to come forward and make such an avowal; — it was a great trial to have imposed upon one so organized as Rachel. He could not go dangling all his life after her, acting the part of cloak-bearer, cup-bearer, purse-bearer — in fact, to be her walking-stick, and nothing more. He was proud as well as herself, and the thought galled him. But then this girl possessed something else beside pride; something which could subdue her pride — than which nothing else would — and that was, the capability of loving. No one could help seeing it who saw anything. It flashed out of her liquid, speaking eyes; it hung upon her ripe, tremulous mouth; it made itself known in the sensitiveness of her nervous little hand; in the sudden flushing of her cheek — the low, impassioned accents of her voice. Yes, she could love, and she *should* love!

As Raymond decided this point for the woman on the other side of the door to him, he drew himself up. He knew he was not entirely destitute of the qualities which women love in men; why should not Rachel succumb to them, as well as others?

> "She is a woman, therefore may be wooed;
> She is a woman, therefore may be won."

he repeated to himself, as the quotation flashed through his mind; and he might have added —

> "She is RACHEL, therefore must be loved."

But though he did not say the words, he thought them to his heart's core.

But how should he woo her? Not by continuing his present course of conduct. In the first place he did not think it would succeed; in the second, he did not choose to win her by that means. He believed that Rachel was a woman to be taken by force; he believed that he was a man so to take her. By his present course of action he might win her compassion — her girlish pity for his dumb suffering; but not her admiration — not her longing nor despair. And he would have them all three; he felt he *must* have them all three before that bright, impulsive creature would humble herself before him and sue him for his love. His citadel was too shrewd to be taken by stratagem; too proud to yield to entreaty; he would march in and take it by the strength of his manhood alone.

He would no longer let her see that her words or actions pained him; that he shrank from her caresses; that he was afraid to be left alone in her presence. He would treat her ever as he had yet done, with the greatest consideration and kindness; but with it should be mixed indifference — feigned, of course (how much feigned, he knew, as he thought of the difficulty of the task which lay before him) — but still true indifference to her. He would shake off his present feelings of apathy and moodiness. He would shine before her as he knew that he could shine, if he tried; she should see him at his best, and, at the same time, see that he was so not for her sake, but because it was his nature so to be. He would no longer forsake his own amusements or his own companions, though both should be indulged in moderately; and then, when Rachel saw him with this shade of melancholy, so foreign to his nature, cast aside — saw him in his true character, as Raymond Norreys — perhaps she might love him, until not to show her love became an impossibility to her.

If this did *not come* to pass, he would apply to be appointed to another *ship; he would leave* England again; he would kill himself with choler

or starvation, or drink, or any other legitimate means, and never see her face nor hear her voice in this life more.

And as Raymond came to a determination so sensible and consolatory as the above, he started from his chair, and pacing the room in one or two rapid turns, appeared to be much the easier from contemplating this possible contingency.

In the meanwhile the object of his musing had laid down to rest in the bed where his dead father had been laid out, and notwithstanding the fiercest arguments with herself, had been totally unable, as she did so, to disencumber her mind of the ghastly remembrance.

Rachel's nerves had been overstrung by the events and mental excitement of the day past, and that fact, added to her natural dread of anything connected with death (as associated with others) kept her keenly alive to the import of what her mother-in-law had told her concerning the bed she lay on having had no occupant since it last bore the weight of that rigid, silent body. As she ensconced herself beneath the clothes, she could not help wondering if the corpse had laid upon those very mattrasses, blankets, and coverlet, and as the thought struck her, drew herself away from their contact as if they were Death itself.

Then she fancied, since the lights had been extinguished, that the room had a damp, unearthly feeling about it, that the hangings of the bed smelt mouldy, and that something was moving and rustling behind their ample folds. It was all very well until Raymond had put out his candle; as long as she had that little line of light to watch, streaming beneath the door and through the keyhole, Rachel glanced towards it every time she felt her fears getting the better of her, and gained fresh courage from the knowledge that some living thing was near at hand.

But when the young man's colloquy ended, and he blew out his candle preparatory to throwing himself for the night upon the sofa in his room, the frightened girl felt as if she could bear it no longer. By that time she had worked her fears up to such a pitch that she fancied shadows were moving between her and the moonlight, and that ghastly corpse-like faces glared upon her round the corners of the bed. As the light was extinguished in her husband's room, leaving the friendly keyhole wrapt in darkness, Rachel, possessed with a sudden and unconquerable terror, darted from the bed, and crouching against the door which divided the apartments, leant her head against the inanimate wood, as if it were a human creature, to support and comfort her. It was well for Raymond's rest he could not divine that whilst he tried to compose himself to sleep a little pale cheek was pressed against the panels of his door, and scared eyes were gazing wide into the surrounding gloom, whilst the throbs of the heart of his terrified wife were almost audible in the stillness of the night. Well for his peace that he did not know that there she lay crouched upon the bedroom steps on this, the first night of her return home, shivering with fear, until very shame, at the contemplation of her weakness, drove her back to the couch she dreaded.

Ah! the worst phantom that haunted those silent rooms that night was the shadow of mutual and unnatural reserve which had raised itself between these two young hearts, and forbidden them to read each other's thoughts.

The ghosts which Rachel need have feared to be alone with were not the ghosts of the Past, but of the Present.

The ghosts of her own coldness, indifference, and hardness of heart towards a man who loved her faithfully, and which ghosts, say what she would, dogged her footsteps by day and by night, with Self-reproach and Self-pity (two phantoms very difficult to lay) following closely in their train.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE MARRIED QUARTERS.

When Caroline Wilson left Mrs. Arundel, to return to the Aldershot Camp, she had a long walk before her, although the lodgings of that lady were on the outskirts of the town of Farnborough. But Mrs. Wilson was used to "roughing" it, and thought little of the daily exercise which she took in attending upon her mistress's children. She had accompanied her husband to India and several other foreign stations, and had lived with him in almost every barrack-town in England; and the soldier's wife who has had a little experience of that sort need not be very particular afterwards. And, to say the truth, although this woman carried at times a foul tongue in her head for her neighbors, and was universally disliked wherever she went by the other inmates of the barracks, she was generally submissive enough to her husband, Sergeant Wilson, and made him a good, hard-working, and non-complaining wife. People said that Wilson (a mild enough man in general to women) must possess some mysterious influence by which he swayed and subdued such a known virago as the partner of his bosom; and they were right. Her husband was about the only creature on earth that Caroline really feared; and although she gave him occasionally what she termed "the rough side of her tongue," she invariably got the worst of the argument, and was bound over to keep the peace for some time afterwards. The secret of his power over her was this: Caroline Wilson had been born to better things than travelling on a baggage-waggon, or helping to wash clothes for the men of a regiment; and in her girlish days, when she was the eldest daughter of Mr. Greenaway, of the firm of Puddle, Greenaway, and Holt, silk-mercers, of St. Paul's Churchyard, and waited behind the counter of her father's shop, in a black silk dress and innumerable ringlets, she would have scorned the idea of ever "taking up" with a private soldier; for be it known that private soldiers, in the class of life from which "young ladies" such as Caroline Greenaway spring, are much looked down upon by the fair sex, and considered very inferior, notwithstanding their inches, bearing, and constant associations with their officers, to the so-called gentlemen who skip about mercers' shops, and serve out ribbons to customers, with radish fingers and chestnut nails. But Miss Caroline Greenaway's notions, like those of many of her sex, had to be brought lower before she could settle herself in marriage; still, it was a matter of supreme wonder to all the "young ladies" at Messrs. Puddle, Greenaway, and Holt's establishment, when, after a sojourn on her part in the country, it was formally annonced to them, by Miss Caroline herself, that she was about to bestow her hand in matrimony upon a private soldier; and "Well, I never!" did good duty on those premises for many a succeeding hour. True, that Miss Caroline was no longer a young girl, eight-and-twenty years having passed over her head, and thinned the abundant ringlets which she was wont to shake across the counter at the gentlemen customers. True, also, that she had had a disappointment (some gave it a harsher name) several years before, since which time she had been less assured and lively, sharper, and crosser-grained than she had been thitherto. But still, "a private!" "a common soldier!" the young women exclaimed, forgetting, as they did so, that privates and common soldiers are made of the same stuff, and, in many cases, much better stuff, than either themselves or their progenitors. But then they wear clothing provided by Government, instead of black cloth coats and trousers, bought with their own money, and silk dresses and gold chains, procured — God knows how! And this is, after all, the crying sin for which their own class condemns them as unclean. However, their animadversions against the servants of the Queen had to be dropped altogether, or only given vent to in furtive whispers, by the hirelings of the establishment in question, after Caroline Greenaway had made up her mind to throw in her lot with one of the military, for she was resolute in her choice, and could hold her own *with the best of them* when so inclined. But the Greenaways felt the

marriage to be a lowering of caste on their part, and, although, for reasons best known to themselves, they consented so to dispose of their eldest daughter, and even hurried the preparations for the marriage, which took place very quietly in the country, they seldom alluded to the circumstance afterwards; and since that time Caroline Wilson had held very little communication with her own family. But if the employees of the linen-draper's establishment had been astonished at a young woman, who had looked for something so much higher, bestowing her hand upon a private soldier, the bridegroom, Thomas Wilson himself, was no less surprised at the condescension of the act.

He had met Miss Greenaway at the house of a mutual friend in the country, and had it not been that she had greatly encouraged him, would never have ventured to make her a downright proposal of marriage. But, with her advances, he began to consider her qualification for the office she aspired to: she was older than himself, certainly, having had five or six years the start of him in life; but men in his station think that circumstance rather an advantage than otherwise; then she was so very "genteel"—so much more so than he had dared to hope for in a wife—it would be so pleasant to present Mrs. Wilson to the other women in his barracks, and feel that she was superior to them all. She was a clever woman, also, and Wilson, being a sensible man, knew the advantages of a good understanding when brought to bear upon every-day matters; and at this period of her life, too, Caroline Greenaway, with her bright black eyes, fresh complexion, and trim figure, was anything but bad-looking. And so Thomas Wilson, being a steady, good soldier, and a credit to his regiment, easily procured the consent of his commanding officer to such an undeniably correct match; and the banns were published without loss of time, the ceremony completed, and he took home his bride to Chatham Barracks. But here, after a while, a change came over the comfort his married life promised to afford him. Mrs. Wilson had been introduced to the various members of the 3rd Royal Bays, pronounced "a very respectable looking woman" by the officers, "a devilish fine figure" by the men, and "too much of a lady for *us*," by the women, and had settled down, apparently, with the greatest good will to the new life surrounding her. But, alas! for the peace of poor Wilson! There is a certain clause in our English Marriage Laws which is a warning to all would-be husbands to look before they leap—a clause by which, should they find, after the fatal deed is over, that their ladywives have, previous to acquaintanceship with themselves, been frail as well as fair, and, instead of dropping them at the door of the Foundling Hospital, been sufficiently imprudent as to keep any little pledges they may possess of their former affection under their own control, they (the husbands) are bound down to support such little pledges as if they were their own, (which is hard,) and bound over to keep the peace as well towards their mothers, which is harder still. But then, the ordinance of matrimony is not one to be rushed into blindfold, and they who do so deserve to be taken in. Thomas Wilson had been so rash. He had known nothing of the former life of Miss Caroline Greenaway when he first saw and wooed her (or suffered her to woo him) in that country visit; and he had married her on her bare word that she was free to become the wife of an honest man. And when he found out, some three months afterwards, that a certain little girl was living in that very country place who claimed his wife as mother, and had done so for the last five years, his fury knew no bounds. Caroline told him the tale, first with a great show of bravado, knowing his helplessness, afterwards, frightened at his rage, with many tears. The child's father was dead, and had been for some time past,—so far so good; but Wilson never quite forgave his wife the scrape into which she had led him. He tried to keep the fact a secret from his fellow comrades; but he always fancied that their wives and themselves knew it as well as he did. He was obliged to support the child, and, as he had none of his own, he felt it no burden except upon his heart. He refused to see her, or to have her home, and the little girl had continued to remain where she had been brought up; but he scarcely ever forgot that she existed, or that he had been duped. The love which might have flourished between him and his wife was withered to the very root the day he

heard that news, and never showed any signs of life afterwards. But, after all, Caroline was a good wife to him. She did everything that he required from her. She took the money he gave her for the child's support thankfully, and almost humbly. Her submission arose from two reasons. In the first place, she was thoroughly afraid of her husband; for, like all bullies, she was a coward, and his rage, when he discovered her treachery towards him, had been so great, that she had never forgotten it; and, in the second, she had loved with all the vehemence of her nature the father of her child. He had never cared for her, (she knew that now); he had thoroughly deceived her; but he had been a gentleman by birth, and he was dead. The first circumstance kept alive her admiration for him — the second, her pity; and where a woman both admires and pities, one need not look far for her love. She doted on the child for the sake of the young, gallant, dead father, and her little Martha was the only thing she cared for in the world. She had often wished since her marriage that she might have had another child, and then Wilson would have known what a parent's feelings were; but years passed away, and still Martha's was the only voice to call her "mother." She heard it sometimes. Whilst in England, her husband would occasionally say to her when he got his pay, "Caroline, my girl, here's a pound for you. You can take a couple of days' holiday, and go and spend it." He never asked afterwards where she had been. He knew as well as if she had told him, that her two days were invariably spent in the little country place where he had first met her, and in the company of her child. In the meanwhile he was rising steadily from one grade to another, until three good-conduct stripes showed upon his arm, and he was promoted to be sergeant. Rachel mentioned to Cecil Craven, in the first part of this story, that Wilson was a pet of her father's, and Dr. Browne's opinion of the man was a universal one. He was the "pet" of the whole regiment, the "pattern" man, respected and indulged by his officers, and a general favorite amongst the men, who considered him one of the luckiest fellows going, to have a smart wife to accompany him everywhere, and neither chick nor child to bother him. But it was some fifteen years or more since Thomas Wilson had committed the folly of the marriage for which his friends envied him, and most of the men who had been in the 3rd then had died, exchanged, or been invalided, and Sergeant Wilson himself, being a hale and stalwart fellow, was about the only sh[illegible] who had been in the corps when that event took place. His wife had [illegible]mpanied him readily on every foreign service to which the regiment upon [illegible]een appointed, and he had promised her once (whilst she nursed him had been [illegible]an attack of cholera in Gibraltar) that he would let her have Martha [illegible] "And [illegible]ive with her when they should next return to England. In the mother, wit[illegible]he child had shot up into a woman, and been for the last three tea." [illegible]ticed to the dressmaking trade in London, being, at the time

"That she sh[illegible]yal Bays reached Aldershot, about twenty years of age. hand, and advanc[illegible]since her birth received any notice from the Greenaways; take [illegible]rust of mi[illegible]gravated her mother to such an extent, that she had stopped of laying it. [illegible]ut communication she had hitherto maintained with her family. [illegible]had been sent for from London on the arrival of the regiment in England, and installed in the Aldershot Barracks; and her father, finding that she was a very handsome, blooming young woman, had sunk some of his prejudices against her, although his reception could scarcely have been termed cordial, and was very willing that she should take her mother's place in keeping his barrack-room comfortable, whilst the latter was away on service in Mrs. Arundel's family. This has been a long explanation, but it is necessary to the better understanding of the circumstances which led to the coming events of my story. As Caroline Wilson walked homewards from Farnborough on the evening in question, her heart beat quite fast at the anticipation of the meeting with her daughter. She had seen little of her during her lifetime, and then been afraid openly to show her affection; but now, for the first time, Martha seemed her own. The 3rd had not yet thoroughly settled down, and some of the regiment were placed anywhere until the head-quarters arrived. The Wilsons had one room allotted them, a large whitewashed room, in that part of the permanent barracks which was *kept for the married* men. It was nearly nine o'clock when Caroline

Wilson arrived there. She went up the general staircase, and through the long passage, expecting on her arrival to find Martha putting the place tidy, and the sergeant himself enjoying his pipe after his evening meal. It had usually been so on her nightly return home during the short time they had been in England; but it was not so to-night. The room looked thoroughly untidy; the hearth was unswept, even the beds unmade, and the partition which screened off that of the girl's, and which was usually put up by that time in the evening, was still resting in its place against the wall. The sergeant himself, in his shirt and trousers, was sitting by the fire-place smoking, with his elbows on his knees, looking thoroughly out of humor, although the whole barrack was resounding with various tunes played upon various instruments, and noisy choruses, accompanied by much clapping of hands and laughter.

"Why, what's the matter, Wilson?" exclaimed his wife, as she caught sight of his forlorn figure. "Haven't you had your tea?"

"How am I to get my tea, I should like to know," he replied roughly, "when there ain't a woman about the place as belongs to me."

"Why, where's Martha?" inquired Mrs. Wilson, as she disencumbered herself of her bonnet and shawl, and hung them up against the wall.

"The devil knows," replied her husband. "I've never set eyes on her since eleven o'clock this morning."

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Mrs. Wilson; "haven't you asked any one about the barracks for tidings of her?"

"Not I," he rejoined, sulkily; "she's none of mine."

This last observation nettled Mrs. Wilson.

"Well, you needn't let the whole barrack know it," she replied, angrily, as she left the room to make inquiries of the other women about her girl.

But Martha was with none of them, nor had she been, and not a few heads were tossed as her mother asked the neighbors of her whereabouts; for "Miss Wilson" was a great deal too pretty to please the matrons of the 3rd Royal Bays, whose husbands had already expressed their admiration of the new-comer's charms more freely than they liked. Only little Mrs. Tomkins, whose marriage had taken place two days before, and who as yet feared no rival, was found willing to afford the necessary information. She had seen Martha Wilson, she said, as she stood blushing at her open door, at about ten o'clock that morning, when the orderly brought round the letters; for the girl had received one, and when she read it, had asked Mrs. Tomkins to tell her father, when he came in from drill, that she was going out, and should not be back until the evening. "But I didn't let her go," was the finale of Mrs. Tomkin's speech, "and I suppose that made it clean out of my head; for I never thought to mention it to the [illegible] till now. I hope it ain't of any consequence;" and, with this [illegible] as her forgetfulness, withdrew again to the company of the en[illegible] kins.

Mrs. Wilson returned to her own room, rather vexed at the [illegible] ness of her daughter, and rather fearful of the remarks of her [illegible] still quite prepared to take the part of the former against the la[illegible]

"Girls will be girls," she remarked, with assumed carelessness, [illegible] re-entered the presence of her lord. "Mrs. Tomkins says she thinks Martha went out for a walk this morning; but what's kept her till now I can't think. I only hope it isn't an accident."

"Accident!" growled the sergeant; "I wonder what accident is likely to befall a hearty lass like that? but I ain't going to keep her here for nothing, and so I shall tell her when next we meet. I've bin alone all day;" and he attacked his pipe again with savage energy. Mrs. Wilson wisely made him, for the present, no answer, but directed her [illegible] to setting out the tea-table, making the kettle boil, and putting the [illegible] for the night. She was quite ready to defend her daughter, but she was mortally afraid of making the sergeant's anger against her worse if she tried to find excuses for her absence. The stone staircase which led to the soldiers' dormitories was so frequently traversed, that one footstep upon it was not discernible from another; and, consequently, in about a quarter of an hour more, the object of their discussion, Martha herself, stood in the doorway, regarding them before they had become aware of her approach. She was,

without doubt, a very handsome girl, — straight as a young poplar, with a well-defined figure, — a brilliant complexion, and dark eyes and hair; the only feature which deteriorated from the beauty of her face being her mouth, which was large and coarse, with full, red lips. But, with all her good looks, there was still overshadowing the countenance of Martha Wilson (as she was called) the same expression of vindictiveness which characterized that of her mother, with this point of redemption only, that she did not appear sly. Bad-tempered and passionate she certainly was; vindictive and revengeful she might be; but there were no signs of craftiness in that voluptuous mouth, nor in the full, wide-open eyes which surmounted it. The girl was dressed fashionably for her station in life, and rather showily. Her little black-net bonnet was set far off her head, whilst a cheap scarlet rose showed on one side of her blooming cheeks; her shawl was half falling off her shoulders and light-flowered muslin dress, exposing well to view the proportions of her ample bust, and not too delicately-shaped waist. She did not appear in the least abashed as she stood in the open doorway, and surveyed the sergeant and his wife; on the contrary, she seemed in a very good-humored mood, for she smiled readily as she caught her mother's eye, displaying all her large white teeth in the action.

"Well, mother!" she exclaimed; "how are you?"

"Lor, Martha!" said Caroline Wilson, starting as the girl addressed her; "how late you are, my dear! Where have you been to?"

But before Martha could answer the question, the sergeant caught up her theme.

"*How are you?*" he said, mimicking her salutation; "is that all you've got to say to your mother when you've absented yourself from duty for a whole day without leave? Ain't you ashamed of yourself to see her a setting out that tea-table, and to know that it hasn't been set out till this hour, when you ought to have been here to do it at five o'clock? If you ain't ashamed you ought to be."

For though Wilson was used to dine at the sergeants' mess with the rest of the non-commissioned officers, he was always sorely put out if his old woman had not a cup of tea ready for him afterwards, at the hour that he loved to take it.

All the good humor vanished from Martha's face as the above remarks reached her ear; her lips pouted, and her eyes (so like her mother's when she was angry) grew dark and sullen.

"No, I ain't," she said, decisively, as she threw her bonnet and shawl upon the bed; "it's mother's business to do it, not mine. I didn't know I had been brought here to be a slave to anybody."

"And I'm sure nobody wants you to be so, Martha," interposed her mother, with a view to domestic peace. "Come, sit down, and have your tea."

"That she sha'n't!" ejaculated the sergeant, rising in his anger, pipe in hand, and advancing towards the tea-table; "that gal don't sit down and take crust of mine till she has asked your pardon for giving you the trouble of laying it, and mine, for stopping out all this time without leave. I'll have no gals running off from this room and amusing themselves — God knows how — for the whole of a summer's day. Now, Martha, you know what you've got to do, and the best thing you can do is to do it."

Fire was flashing from beneath the girl's lowered brows; and her return look at the sergeant was one of unmitigated defiance.

"And that I won't," she replied, with a toss of her angry head. "I've never asked pardon of any one yet, as I can remember, and I ain't going to begin with you, I can tell you." And she looked as if she meant what she said.

"Caroline," said the sergeant, almost trembling with his rage, "there's your daughter, and if you don't wish to see me put her out of this room to-night with these two hands, you'd better bring her to reason. I've borne a good deal from you at times, but —— I'm not going to bear it again from any one, let alone such as her."

Caroline Wilson saw that something serious would happen if she did not interfere, and, therefore, she attempted to coax, her daughter into a semblance of submission, by saying, —

"Come, Martha, my girl, just tell your father as you're sorry, and won't do it again, and that will set us all right in a couple of words."

But here Sergeant Wilson again interposed.

"Her father! I'm no father of hers! Don't go sticking any lies of that sort down that gal's throat, Caroline, or as sure as there's a heaven above us, I'll let the whole barrack know what she and her mother is."

But Mrs. Wilson was to be cowed no longer.

"I know you ain't," she retorted; "her father was a better man than you any day. He was none of your low sort who find fault for nothing at all, and then threaten to turn helpless women from their doors when they don't mean it."

"Don't I mean it, by ——!" returned the sergeant. "Caroline, will that gal of yours say where she's bin the whole of this day, and ask pardon for the trouble she's given, or not?"

The "gal," whom it did not appear worth while to take into this discussion, had, until now, stood a little apart, returning the glances, which were alternately directed to her by the sergeant and his wife, with a haughty, impudent look, as if she would show how little she cared about their quarrel, or themselves. But this time she chose to give her own answer.

"No, I won't," she said, defiantly; "I won't say where I've been, or why; nor I won't ask your pardon, neither. I'm not a slave, and there's plenty as I could go to this night as would be glad to see me, and keep me better than you will ever do."

"Then go to them," shouted the sergeant; "for you sha'n't stop here and give a loose to your tongue whenever you please; I've had enough of that from your mother."

But at this point Mrs. Wilson was thoroughly alarmed.

"You wouldn't leave your mother, Martha, would you?" she said; "when it isn't more than ten days since we've met each other; and I have longed for this time for years." Something in her mother's voice touched the girl's nature, and she replied, more quietly, though not less sullenly, —

"Well, it isn't my fault, mother, any way; it's the fault of that man there. I've got friends in London — where you left me to be brought up — as I care for; and if I can't go and see 'em when and how I choose — without questions being asked, and pardons being given every time — why I'd rather go back to my dressmaking at once, for this isn't the sort of life to suit me."

"If you think," said Sergeant Wilson, deigning again to address Martha herself, "that I'll have a gal under my care — be she mine or not — running up and down to London — or any other place — just when she chooses, and carrying on any sort of game she likes, you're very much mistaken. If you lives in these barracks along with your mother and self (which I am sorry I ever gave her leave to bring you home) you sha'n't go to disgrace the regiment to which we belong. If you've got respectable friends in London, well and good; when it's convenient, your mother or I will take you up there for to see 'em; but you don't go alone again, so don't think of it, and you don't leave this room either without giving us notice that you are going out, and why: for you come of a bad stock," he added, as a final pleasantry, "and I doubt you're no more to be trusted than your mother was before you."

It was the second time the subject had been mentioned that evening: and the girl, although low bred and born, had some feelings in her akin to those of others. She turned rather pale now as she twisted round her figure so as to confront her mother's gaze.

"Mother," she said, "is that truth or not? Ain't this man my father?"

The wretched woman had hoped to keep her shameful secret from her daughter, but she saw no help now but to confess the truth to her.

"No, he's not, Martha," she replied, with a show of bravado. "It's as well you should know it as not. This man's my husband, bad luck to him; but we haven't been married more than fifteen years. Your father was a gentleman, my girl, born and bred. You might have known you didn't come from such blood as common soldiers are made of."

"*So he ain't* my father," repeated Martha, as if the surprise of the discovery had for the moment quite subdued her. "I'm glad you've told me, mother, for I couldn't have felt to him as one, any way."

"Couldn't have felt to me as one? you young hussy," returned the sergeant. "I wouldn't own such as you for my daughter. Get out of my room, will you, and your mother may go after you, if she chooses. I'll stand this sort of thing no longer, and that I tell you."

"Wilson, you're not in earnest?" screamed the mother. "I've been very hasty, Wilson, I know I have, and said a lot of things that I shouldn't have said, but you drove me to it. You wouldn't really turn a girl like this out of your room, and at night, too? It's dark, Wilson; think of that." In her agony for her daughter, and the fear of losing her, Caroline Wilson forgot her own rage, and would have humbled herself in the dust before her husband. But the girl herself prevented it.

"'Tain't of no use, mother," she said, "for I wouldn't stay here for a thousand pounds. I ain't none of his, and now I knows it I won't be beholden to him for a crust of bread. I can get my own living, never fear;" and she commenced to reassume her bonnet and shawl as she spoke.

"Martha, my dear, listen to me," urged her mother. "Wilson, you'll never let her go, a young thing like that, and not a roof to turn to. Wilson, you're a man; keep her by us till to-morrow morning."

"Caroline," said the sergeant, solemnly; "if your daughter will do now what I've asked of her before — beg my pardon for her fault, and say she won't repeat it, I'll be ready to look it over, and keep her here, not only till to-morrow morning, but as long as she chooses to stay along of us. But I've passed my word, and it can't be arranged otherwise."

"Martha, my dear," said the mother, turning to the girl herself, "do as he asks you; it is only a word, my dear, and everything will be right and comfortable between us again."

"I don't want nothing to be right nor comfortable," responded the girl, still making arrangements for her departure. "As I've said before, I ain't a black, and I shan't ask that man's pardon, nor any one's."

"Then go to the devil with you!" exclaimed the sergeant, fairly roused and indignant at the girl's insolence.

"Not I," she shouted, throwing back a parting word at him, "for fear of meeting you there." She flounced down the barrack stairs as she spoke, but before she had reached the bottom step, her mother, with her walking-things hastily thrown about her, was by her side.

"Martha, dear, where are you going to?" she said, as she joined her daughter.

"Intimacy knows and cares," she said, "for I don't."

A shudder ran through Caroline Wilson's frame as she heard the reckless words, and remembered what recklessness had ended in for her own blighted youth. As they passed out of the barrack gate, the bugle sounded "All lights out." The large camp was suddenly wrapt in darkness, and ten strokes pealed out from some clock near at hand.

"I sha'n't get back into camp to-night," said Caroline Wilson, as she heard the sound, "and so I shall go into Farnborough with you, my girl, and get Mrs. Bennett" (Mrs. Bennett being the landlady of Mrs. Arundel's lodgings) "to put us up till the morning."

When the two women had, after dint of a good deal of perseverance, roused the sleepy servant-girl at the lodgings aforesaid, and upon relating a piteous tale of their being shut out of barracks by mistake, gained her mistress's consent to their passing the remainder of the night upon her kitchen floor, the mother had time to give over the vituperative abuse of her husband, which she had kept up all the way from Aldershot to Farnborough, and consider seriously with her daughter what was to be done for her in the future. Martha had said she would return to the dressmaking trade, but there were difficulties in the way of that plan, for the time of her apprenticeship was up, and as an assistant she would have to board out of the establishment, which project required more ready money than her mother could at present command, for, of course, assistance from the sergeant was not now to be depended on.

"Would you mind service, Martha!" inquired her mother, presently; and Martha said — no she shouldn't, not if it was a good place, and she could get a holiday now and then.

"Mrs. Arundel wants me to go and live with her at Weybridge," said Mrs. Wilson, and I refused on your account; but if you fancy it, Martha, and I could get you into a house like the Court, now, which is close to Laburnum Cottage, or whatever they call the place, I could see after you a bit, and know that you weren't put upon in any way, and were happy, and so on; for I haven't got anything but you, my dear, to care for, and to think about."

Her daughter was quite agreeable to the plan. She wouldn't mind trying service, or anything, so long as she wasn't asked to go back to the barracks, for she wouldn't do that, "not for ever so;" she'd starve first.

And so it was arranged between them, before the morning, that Mrs. Wilson should accept Mrs. Arundel's offers of further service, by which means she would continue to have a little money of her own, and be able to see her daughter, and benefit her. And to this plan Caroline knew the sergeant would not be likely to raise any objection, for he was only too glad when he could get her tongue out of his quarters and his pay to himself. The only stipulation he ever made when she expressed a desire to leave him for service, was that she should support herself. "For as I have to pay a woman to do your work," he used to say, "you must see, Caroline, that that is only fair."

But during the vigil held by the two women in that dark little kitchen, Caroline ventured once to put a question to her daughter relative to the subject of the evening's quarrel.

"You'll tell *me*, Martha, deary," she said, "me, who am your own mother, what took you to London to-day, and kept you there, won't you? Was it anything to do with the letter that Mrs. Tomkins said she saw you receive this morning?"

But Martha wasn't to be cajoled out of her secret, even by her own mother.

"That's *my* business," she said, in reply; "and mother, if you don't want to quarrel with me, as that man in the barracks did, I think you'll hold your tongue on the subject, and not bother me with any more questions. For I ain't a sieve; and when I choose to keep a thing to myself, I keeps it."

CHAPTER XVII.

DISCLOSES SOME OF THEIR PLANS.

It was perfectly true that Mrs. Arundel had made an offer to retain Caroline Wilson in her service after she had settled at Weybridge, and that the woman's refusal of the same had greatly annoyed her, although it is difficult to imagine to what account, at this time, the mistress thought of turning the servant's talent for deception. Perhaps her wish to keep her in her pay arose simply from a fear that she might repeat more in the regiment than it was at present convenient for Mrs. Arundel to have known; and, therefore, until the design she had in her heart to execute was accomplished, it was as well to have one who knew and had heard so much under her own surveillance. For that Eliza Arundel had made up her mind to marry Cecil Craven, needs scarcely here to be publicly registered. What mattered it that it was scarcely a month since her poor blundering, forbearing husband had been swept off the deck of the homeward-bound transport, and hurried into eternity without a farewell word to her or any one? As she had had it in her possible nature to dream of this contingency long before there was any chance of its happening, so she found no difficulty in rejoicing in its occurrence even in the first blush of her freedom. She was too cunning to let the world guess this, as she had been too cunning in the days of her married life to let it solve the riddle of the change in her manner towards Cecil Craven, and her jealousy of Rachel Norreys. She had hated to see these two together in their walks and rides, to mark their pleasure at meeting, their whispered confidences, and mutual

understanding; and yet she had furthered it all, and appeared to take a delight in furthering it, as if she rejoiced in nursing her jealousy, and in having as substantial a cause as possible against Cecil Craven for her reproachful glances and sighs. For the days had been when that gentleman had affected the company of his major's wife far more than he did at present; days that he now looked back upon with unmitigated surprise at the bad taste of his youth, but which the object of his then passion had never forgotten. Cecil had passed through the ordeal like many another junior of he 3d Royal Bays before him, fiercely for the time, but soon cured, and eady to question, before three months were over, what on earth could ave so infatuated him as to make him fancy he was in love with Eliza rundel. But though the lady herself was used to that sort of thing, and ad stood fire against a score of love-sick boys before, who had only nused her by their openly-expressed admiration of her flaxen hair, and hina blue eyes — no less than by the rapid fading away of their arduous ttentions, somehow, the same compliments from Cecil Craven's mouth ad not sounded quite so hackneyed in her ears, and she missed them sadly hen they ceased to be. There was something in the suave, gentlemanly anners of the boy of eighteen — something perhaps, too, in the handme fair face, and graceful figure of the stripling, which went home wonerfully to the heart of this woman of the world — for that, although only ur years his senior, Eliza Arundel, when he first met her, already was. e would have broken through her meshes as other birds had done before m, as soon as he had tired of his fancy; but once trapped, the major's ife would not let him go. He tried hard to escape, but she held on to m with too powerful a hand; and what man under two-and-twenty can sist being made love to by a tolerable looking woman, even though she one of whom he is already a little tired? "She's all very well," used Cecil aven to say to himself, "when there's nobody better to make love to," d with this sort of compulsory homage was Eliza Arundel obliged to tisfy her penchant for the young Adonis who lorded it over her. For veral years he was known to be fetcher and carrier to Mrs. Arundel; d during these years it was that the scandal concerning them, which s already been alluded to in this story, rose up, was commented upon, d extinguished.

But a day came when Rachel Norreys left her finishing school for the last me, and accompanied her father to Gibraltar with the 3d Royal Bays. he intimacy that had subsisted between these two as children drew em closer together than the usuages of society would have done, particurly as Rachel was a married woman; and Dr. Browne had always apeared desirous of cementing their friendship as much as lay in his power, r we know now that he had loved the mother of the young man, and erished her remembrance. Then it was that the demon of jealousy took ssession of Mrs. Arundel, even at the very time that she was fawning on and caressing Rachel Norreys, and worming all her secrets from out e bosom of the young unsuspecting girl. Rachel commenced by thinkg Mrs. Arundel very kind and friendly, went on by wondering what she uld find so attractive in herself, and ended by imagining that she cared r the friend who always swore she loved her, and had got possession of e of her most private opinions. But the last few months had opened hel's eyes in a slight degree to the character of her confidante. She uld rather have kept them closed; she bore the light badly, blinking at , and laying the fault of the sun upon her own powers of vision; but to he or two particulars she could be no longer blind. She knew that Eliza rundel was not perfectly sincere; she almost believed that she had not een so in everything, even to herself.

Cecil Craven guessed the state of feeling which his ci-devant flame was ertaining for him, but he did not care about it. *His* eyes were fully en now, and had been for some time past, and his only desire was to ep Rachel Norreys from too great an intimacy with Mrs. Arundel; but that he had been unsuccessful, because he found, for his warnings to ave any effect with the former, that he must be more explicit than he oved him, *as a gentleman*, to speak of one lady to another. He had been *bjected to a great* deal of reproach on Mrs. Arundel's part when he first

forswore his allegiance to her; he had been forced to be the witness of a great many tears; to feel himself the cause of whole days of seclusion, from which she would issue with heavy eyes and pallid features; but though these circumstances annoyed and irritated him, her fascination over him had lost its power to make him feel more, and gradually his tormentor had dropped her futile attempts to win him back, although she only bided her opportunity. But at this time when she resolved, against the wishes of both her own family and that of her late husband, to take Laburnum Cottage, and settle near the Court, it must not be imagined that love for Cecil Craven influenced her decision. Even the brief passion she had entertained for him in former days, and to which she had given that sacred name, was no more love than she was Venus; and that had long since died away, and in its place, and for the sake of what her vanity had suffered in losing his admiration, she longed for her revenge. She would like to settle near his home; to see him when there were no calls of duty to distract his attention from her; to revive the old days, the old recollections in one word, to supersede Rachel Norreys in his affections; to cast her chains about him again, and to induce him to make her his wife. She knew the temperament of the man she was about to work on; she had read his soft, yielding disposition only too well, and she believed that, with fair play, the game would be in her own hands.

But ductile as he was, she had not quite fathomed the depth of Cecil's long-rooted aversion to herself. When he heard, a few days after his interview with Rachel Norreys in the lodgings at Farnborough, that Laburnum Cottage had been certainly taken on a long lease by Mrs. Arundel, his disgust knew no bounds; but he did not like to say too much to his mother against her coming neighbor. In the first place, the same obstacle which had opposed itself to his attempts at dissuading Rachel from being too intimate with the lady in question, the impossibility of giving a good reason for his own dislike of her, rose up whenever he tried to speak on the subject with Mrs. Craven. And, after all, she was a woman, and a woman he had once professed to like, and Weybridge was open to her as to the world; and he trusted a great deal to his mother's powers of discernment, which he hoped would very soon make her aware how far the new-comer was to be relied upon as a friend. But in this he was too confident; for although Mrs. Craven was a far cleverer woman than Mrs. Arundel, her cleverness stood no chance against the other's craftiness. Mrs. Craven was quick at understanding a subject or in managing an affair, but she was foolishly hasty on occasions, often led away by her fancy and very open to flattery, as who is not? Mrs. Arundel, on the contrary was not quick, but she was cunning, which often answers better when the purpose is bad. The one woman possessed a rash impetuosity which might hurry her into any crime, and dexterity enough to accomplish it; but there her cleverness ended. She had no power to go happily through life afterwards, and to sit down smiling under concealment; no art or sophistry wherewith to reason herself out of the remembrance of a committed wrong; whilst the other, without the same excitement to urge her forward, sinned her sins, and only regretted them if they failed of success and was perfectly contented so long as her own subtlety could hide them from the world. No ghost of an unredeemed past ever came by night to startle Eliza Arundel from uneasy sleep, to remind her of the lying looks and words which were the daily coinage she passed amongst her friends. She had used them so long; she had so familiarized herself with deception that it was doubtful if she could really distinguish between what was truth and what falsehood. Therefore it was that Cecil Craven showed his usual mediocrity of judgment when he compared his mother's intellect with Mrs. Arundel's guile, and thought it was a fair case of "diamond cut diamond. He did go so far as to say, when the news reached Craven Court that the widow had really taken the cottage, —

"I'm sorry to hear it. Don't let her get too intimate here, mother; we don't want a lot of women popping in at any hour of the day." But his mother had laughed, and said she supposed he was afraid of his *tete-a-tetes* with Lady Frances Morgan being interrupted, (which tete-a-tetes, indeed were becoming very frequent, and decidedly warmer upon each repeat

tion;) but that he must remember that his old mother wanted a companion now and then as well as himself. "And, indeed," Mrs. Craven concluded by saying, "it will be quite a blessing for me if Mrs. Arundel proves a nice acquaintance, for a quiet lady friend to run in and talk to me sometimes is just what I want. Besides, poor thing! she must be badly off to have decided upon taking the cottage, which is an extra reason that we should be kind to her, Cecil, since you seem to have received a great deal of hospitality at her hands."

Cecil bit his lip, and was silent. He could just imagine how "quiet" Mrs. Arundel would pretend to be as long as it gained her the entree of the Court; how sympathetic, how exemplary, how woe-begone! and how very kindly she would take to "running in" at every hour of the day, and appearing at every meal that graced their table. And yet, how could he object to his mother choosing her own friends, or showing attention to the widow of the major of his regiment? Poor Cecil was in a quandary, and he was not clever enough to pick his way out again, and so he directed his attention to Lady Frances as a pleasanter subject, and tried to forget that the other existed.

The "quiet, unhappy, and badly off" appearance was exactly the line of action that Mrs. Arundel had elected to take up, as being the one most calculated to prove interesting to the mistress of Craven Court, to whom the character could prove no rival; and with that idea in view, she had, like a good general, reviewed her forces, examined her ammunition, and settled on her point of attack. With regard to the last requisition, nothing could have suited her better in every respect, than the little house which went by the name of Laburnum Cottage. It was a tiny place, of not more than four rooms besides the kitchen offices, and had originally been built for a lodge to Craven Court; but when a portion of that property was parted with to form a public road, had been sold, and a fresh lodge erected close to the new boundaries of the estate. The purchaser of Laburnum Cottage, when he had concluded his bargain, had scarcely known what to do with it: it was too small for the permanent occupancy of gentlepeople, and too far from the town for the convenience of the poor; and so he had surrounded it with a tasteful little garden, furnished it in a cheap style, and let it for the summer months to people desirous of a few weeks' change into the country. Thus, year after year, an advertisement very similar to the following had appeared in the columns of the daily papers:—

"WEYBRIDGE.—To be let, furnished, near this charming locality, for a long or short period, a cottage ornee, containing every convenience for a family, with large shrubbery and pleasure-garden, extensive lawn, and trout-stream running through the premises. Rent, if taken by the week, three guineas.—Address, 'A. B.,' Laburnum Cottage, Weybridge."

Heads of families, who had made up their minds to pass the hot weather out of town, and give all the little Browns, Joneses, or Tomkinsons, the benefit of country air whilst they could enjoy it, were wont to snatch at this advertisement, and say to materfamilias, "Weybridge! Let's see, my dear. Ah! close to Walton-on-Thames, The very thing for us! And fancy how pleasant having the large shrubbery and garden for the dear children, and a trout-stream actually in the grounds—the very thing for Tom and Dick!—convenience itself! I'll write at once, and ascertain the veracity of the advertisement." And, after writing, the head of the family had been used to run down to Weybridge by train to see the place he had already determined in his heart to call for the summer his own, and was generally disappointed at finding that the cottage ornee contained only four rooms—that the shrubbery, extensive lawn, and pleasure-garden consisted of a circular plot of grass surrounded by a small carriage-drive and belted by a few clumps of laurustinus and arbor vitæ—and that the trout-stream was a ditch running through the tiny back garden, which, whatever it might be in the days of winter, was, at the time when fishing is a desirable occupation, invariably dried up or stagnant. If there is one thing above another that John Bull hates, it is being taken in: and the general consequence of viewing Laburnum Cottage was that honest men were made to swear a great deal more than was needful; but some there were, with small families, who, sickened of many similar newspaper lies, and, after

much searching, having nowhere to lay their heads, would, almost a; their own conscience, come to an understanding with the landlord c burnum Cottage, and, after beating him down to half the rent he ask it, establish themselves as summer inmates of the little place. B means Craven Court had had strange neighbors, and most of the lo at the cottage were of such questionable birth, that Mrs. Craven wa to think that a gentlewoman was to be its permanent inmate. Mrs. del had shown great adroitness by the manner in which she had whe the owner of the cottage to let her have it upon lease on her own t and although he was rather tired of the constant trouble which his f plan of letting and re-letting had imposed upon him, a woman wit blandishment in her voice and smoothness on her tongue would sc have persuaded him to accept her terms so readily. But he was pers somehow, and had agreed to let her hold the cottage, furnished as i upon a very low rent for a lease of seven years. And thus provided precisely the house she had wished for, her two boys placed at sch her husband's family, and only little Emily left upon her hands, th thing wanting to Mrs. Arundel had been the securing of Caroline W as her aid-de-camp; and when that worthy, after the conversation with her daughter in Mrs. Bennett's kitchen, expressed herself read willing to accompany her mistress on her new life, Elise Arundel f she transferred herself and baggage to Laburnum Cottage, as if sh all that, for the present, she could wish for.

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the invitation; and those who had what they termed "a young man," would go in his company wheresoever he chose to take them. Amongst the last was Martha Wilson. She was a fine, showy girl, with a tolerable amount of conversation in her, and had unfortunately attracted the attention of one of those anomalous creatures who, writing themselves down "gentlemen," still take a greater pleasure in associating with people beneath them in rank than with their equals. The man, however, who had condescended occasionally to take notice of Martha Wilson (for in truth his attentions were nothing more), was really one of the upper classes, although, from his companions and appearance, it would have been difficult to tell at a glance to what grade he belonged. He had met the girl accidentally, and almost accidentally continued his acquaintance with her. He found her smart, voluble, and not more forward than he admired; and he very soon discovered that where he had simply intended having a "lark," he had contrived to make a very deep impression. Martha was of a very susceptible nature, and the mystery connected with her friend (for she knew that the name he gave her of Tom White was an assumed one) combined with her knowledge that he was a gentleman, all served to heighten the interest she felt in him. For had he not taken her down the river in a boat, in company with other gentlemen, one of whom called him by some long name that she could scarcely remember, and to which he had replied, "Hush! hold your tongue, Cavendish!" And had she not been once to see him at his chambers in the Albany, where everything was fit for a prince, and when she asked for Mr. White, had not the hall-porter who opened the door said there was no one there of that name, until he came himself in a beautiful flowered silk dressing-gown, and called over the banisters that it was "all right," and then she had been allowed to go up and see him? And had he not called her his "own Martha," and said she deserved to be a lady, or words to that effect? Poor Martha thoroughly loved and worshipped this mysterious hero of her imagination, this prince of gentlemen, this nobleman in disguise. She felt for him as a dog feels for his master, that to lie at his feet alone would be happiness too great for her. She seldom indulged in any dreams of his marrying her. She would have been content could she have known for certain that until her dying day she might have the privilege of waiting upon him, and receiving in return one of those smiles he was wont to bestow upon her when she said anything that pleased him. In reality, the gentleman in question was a very dissipated individual. But Martha knew nothing of this — saw nothing of it. To be within hail of this divinity of her imagination — to see him sometimes, to hear his voice, and know that he was well and happy, was all that her infatuation demanded. She loved him blindly, like a dumb animal that knows not the name of esteem, but she loved him well. And to gain her liberty sometimes for this purpose, Martha was willing to go into service, else it was not the kind of life that best suited the inclinations of a girl who had been left so much to herself. It was a note from him which had taken her to London on the morning she quarrelled with her mother's husband, simply a wish expressed to see her from the worldly man who had no better amusement for the day in view; but it had had the effect of taking her into his presence as quickly as train would do it, and was the consequence, as has been seen, of her being turned out of her mother's home. Well, she was in service now, as under-housemaid at the Court, and although she did not much like Mrs. Watson's tone of authority, nor the strictness of her rules, she must make the best of it for the sake of those "Sundays out" which came round once in three weeks, when she would have the happiness and glorification of breathing the same air as her idol.

In the mean while her mother arrived at Laburnum Cottage, in the service of Mrs. Arundel, and constituted, with the exception of a woman who came in daily to do the cooking and dirty work, the whole of the menage of that bower of artlessness and truth.

Eliza Arundel was very much indeed the forlorn and broken-spirited widow for the first few weeks that she was the mistress of the cottage. Bereft of her husband by such a cruel and sudden shock; bereft of her children, her *dear* boys, from the fact of her means not permitting her to keep them by her, reduced to *this*, with only her sweet little daughter to

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bear her company, the widow did indeed appear a creature to be made much of, and pitied, and consoled, in the stranger eyes of Mrs. Craven. Indeed, she was so greatly taken upon first sight with her new acquaintance, that she openly condemned the unfeeling manner in which Cecil had spoken of his poor friend; and thought that it was impossible she could do too much to show her sympathy in such an affliction, and her gratitude for the past kindness her son had received at Mrs. Arundel's hands.

The gardener at Craven Court was directed, much against his will, to send a man to stock and put in order the little garden of Laburnum Cottage; and scarcely a day passed but fruit, vegetables, and flowers found their way from the amply stocked conservatories and hot-houses of the Court into its tiny kitchen.

Mrs. Arundel wept over the offerings, and said they were too much, and she felt she was a burden, but took them nevertheless, and inveigled herself more, day by day, into the confidence of Mrs. Craven. Cecil saw the growing friendship and hated it, but he avoided the presence of the widow whilst she kept to her own house, and part of her plan, at first, was to vote herself unfit for any society, and only anxious to be buried in solitude, and thus excite the further admiration of her new acquaintance. By-and-by she intended to be forcibly dragged from her seclusion by the entreaties of Mrs. Craven, so that her entry into the Court should not appear to be of her own seeking. In the mean while she was a great deal too deep to mention Cecil to his mother, unless the latter introduced his name, when she would scientifically turn the conversation in his praise, but still always professed to smile (sadly of course, Mrs. Arundel could only smile sadly in those days) at the idea of his coming to visit her in her new home, a project which his mother (anxious to screen his apparent impoliteness) used frequently to mention as likely to take place.

"*Me!* dear Mrs. Craven—what should the dear boy want to come and see *me* for? and at such a time. Ah! the days have been when we were all very happy together, but they are past! Youth and cheerfulness choose similar qualities in their associates, and, but for such as you, dear Mrs. Craven, I am best alone."

CHAPTER XVIII.

RACHEL GETS THE WORST OF IT.

Rachel Norreys had been a month in England, and August had faded into September, as she stood one afternoon with an opened letter in her hand, watching apparently for some one's return, from the dining-room window of Abbey Lodge. She had altered, since we saw her last, though it wat difficult at first to determine where the difference lay. Certainly, she had grown stouter, and her cheeks were no longer pale; but the change was not in these; it showed itself more in the expression of her face, which had lost its look of discontent and weariness, and gained, instead, one of restless anxiety, which appeared never to allow her to remain quiet. Even as she now stood, alone and unoccupied, the least noise made her cheeks change color, her head turn, and a nervous action (which was a characteristic of the girl's temperament) observable in her hands. Her beautiful hazel eyes had regained much of their former vivacity, although they could look very soft at times, and a smile was far oftener seen now upon her arched and dewy lips than a frown upon her brow; for, in a few words, Rachel was far happier at Abbey Lodge than she had ever anticipated being, and she was of too generous a nature to deny the fact, even in her looks. Her sister-in-law and herself were great friends; it was quite impossible to resist the frank, arch playfulness of Christine, nor to avoid catching the infection of her unvarying cheerfulness and good humor. She would not allow Rachel to be depressed or melancholy; she charmed *her out of all such* moods by her affectionate persuasion and light-hearted *view of trouble.* And for all her sister-in-law's short-comings with regard

to those inexorable, hard-hearted bells that would ring so precisely to time, and attention to the various rules laid down by Mrs. Norreys for the edification and distraction of her household, Christine ever had a valid excuse, and was found ready to stand as mediatrix between the offender and offended. In fact, she was nobly carrying out a certain promise extracted from her by her brother in the dusk of a summer's evening. With the old lady Rachel did not get on quite so well, though the fact of her being "Raymond's" wife was sufficient to shield her from more than an occasional mild hint, or a starched and frozen greeting when the trespass had been very flagrant, and often repeated; but she could not help fancying that Mrs. Norreys knew more than she chose Raymond and herself to be aware of; that she guessed at the reserve between them, and that she attributed her son's frequent absence to its real cause — that he was not on the terms that he should be with his young wife. And this surmise, true or otherwise, made Rachel more shy with her mother-in-law than she would have been, and created a barrier between them. But she could not be reserved with Christine; the nature of the daughter of the house was too sunny to permit of it. She had no idea that anything was wrong between her brother and his wife (her mother was scarcely likely to canvass her own opinions on the subject with so young a woman), and they suited each other exactly. And under her influence, Rachel had parted with the resolution she had come to not to accept her sister-in-law's affection until she had claimed that of her husband. She had parted with several opinions which she had then considered bigoted, since the evening that she crouched against the door of her husband's room, although the phantoms that frequented her path that night had encountered no higher power to lay them, and frequented it still. She no longer feared to sleep in her haunted bed, and laughed within herself at the remembrance of the terror she had experienced, and yet she often laid herself down upon it with a sigh. For if she had acknowledged the folly of some of her determinations, Raymond had not followed her example. He still maintained the character he had assumed from the first day that he brought his wife home to Abbey Lodge. He rose daily from his uneasy rest upon the little sofa in his room, apparently in the most buoyant of spirits, met Rachel at the breakfast-table armed with laughter and mirth-provoking jests, — went about all his business in the same light-hearted manner, — spent his evenings, sometimes nearly all his days, abroad, and returning to the Lodge in the same mood that he went, would treat Rachel as if she was a young lady staying in the house, and nothing more. The girl could not understand his present course of action. He never lowered his voice when speaking to her now; he never sighed or looked intensely grave; or if he did so, she neither heard nor saw him. Occasionally he would pay her a compliment on the improvement in her looks, just such a foolish, empty compliment as he might have paid to any chance partner at a ball, and this style of address aggravated his wife more than any other.

"By Jove, Rachel," he would exclaim, on first encountering her in the morning, "how blooming you look! I told you England would suit you far better than Gibraltar; or have you been expending my substance on rouge? No! really not? Then I must be a lucky fellow to have a wife with a pair of cheeks like that, mustn't I?" And when she would say perhaps, in a tone of entreaty, "*Don't*, Raymond," he would provokingly reply, "I had no intention of kissing you, my dear; don't be alarmed;" and send Rachel flying back to her bedroom to disperse the traces of her indignation (and occasionally of her tears) before she encountered the searching glances of her mother-in-law.

She would throw her thoughts back sometimes to the day when they first met at Gibraltar, and the conversation which had taken place between them at that time. Had her husband quite forgotten it, and the story of his faithful love that he had told her then? She could not believe so, and yet it seemed as if he had. A dozen times a day she caught herself wondering at his behavior, and quite unable to account for it. She wondered where he went when he passed his evenings away from home; who he saw and associated with, and what he did. She wondered if he really admired and loved her still, or whether he had contrived already to bury all such feelings, and had even forgotten, in so short a time, that once they were

She wondered if it had been her behavior alone that had worked such a sudden and a mighty change in Raymond, and conscience whispered that it was. She wondered sometimes if it would last forever; if all her life was to be spent in company with such indifference; and when this last wonderment came into her heart, her face would redden with a woman's shame at being slighted, and her teeth would set themselves upon the nervous lip beneath them. Raymond had certainly succeeded in awakening her curiosity, but what feeling respecting him would next sway her bosom seemed as yet a dead uncertainty.

She was watching for him on the afternoon on which she is re-introduced to the reader, although, perhaps, she would scarcely have acknowledged the fact. She had just received a visit from Cecil Craven, who was the bearer of a letter from his mother, inviting herself and her husband to stay at the Court, and the thought of the visit having unsettled her, she felt anxious to have the matter decided. Major Craven, during a long interview, spent with her alone, had so entreated, and coaxed, and persuaded her to induce her husband to accept his mother's invitation, that she had half promised him that she would do her best to comply with his request. And now she was not sure that she had been right in saying so, and she wanted Raymond to come back and put his veto against any such proceeding, and permit her to feel that she was following his wishes and her own at the same moment; for Rachel dreaded the idea of such a visit. For reasons best known to herself, she shrunk from its fulfilment, and had Cecil Craven been less regarded by her than he was, she would never have allowed him to talk her over as much as he had done. But anxious for her company himself, he had been traitor enough to hold out the fact of Mrs. Arundel's proximity to the Court, as a further inducement to allure Rachel under the shadow of his mother's roof. In the mean while she felt tolerably easy about the matter; Raymond appeared so little interested now in anything that concerned herself, he seemed to care so little for her society, or her wishes, that it was easy to conjecture that he would resist the idea of giving up his town amusements and companions to accompany his wife upon a visit in the country. She was so busy ruminating upon his past and present conduct, and the probabilities of the issue of his decision upon the project in question, that some one entered the room before she had been aware of a footstep in the hall. She turned quickly as she heard it, and encountered the (to her) uninteresting physiognomy of Mr. Alexander Macpherson. This young gentleman and Rachel had not taken kindly to one another. She was very quick at reading character, and the selfishness, causeless jealousy, and ill temper of poor Christine's fiance, combined with his obstinacy in any argument which related to his native land, had impressed her unfavorably from the first, and she had often secretly compared his conduct with that of another gentleman of her acquaintance.

He, on his part, had also felt a want of attraction towards Rachel, but this feeling arose, not from any ill qualities he had observed in her, so much as from the jealousy he experienced at the interest [illegible] appeared to take in her new sister, and Rachel's fascinations, both of mind and person, had formed the subject of many a drawn battle between the engaged pair, ever since the former had set foot in Abbey Lodge. If Christine ventured, in Rachel's absence, to admire the color of her eyes or hair, or to make a remark upon her singing or conversation, Mr. Macpherson was ready to affirm that her eyes were not hazel, but brown,—a common every-day brown,—and Christine might call Mrs. Raymond's hair chestnut if she liked, but if his opinion had been asked upon the subject, he should have pronounced it plain red, and nothing else.

"But your opinion has not been asked," Christine would cry; "and if Rachel's hair is red, you ought to admire it all the more, since red is the favorite Scotch color." Then her lover's face would inflame, and his eyes grow perfectly round, as he attempted to imbue the mind of his hearer with the fact that there was no more red hair in Scotland than in either of the sister countries, and that what Christine termed so, he supposed, was *something of the* same color as what he bore on his own head. And Christine would answer slyly that Alick's hair was a little red, now she

came to look at it; but, at all events, he would allow that there was not the slightest resemblance between his and that of her sister-in-law.

"Always your sister-in-law," Mr. Macpherson would exclaim. "I never can come in here now for a quiet talk with you, Christine, but you are close closeted with Mrs. Raymond Norreys, talking secrets; or she comes, or your brother does, and sits in the room with us; and if by happy chance they are both absent, you indulge me with a list of their various perfections: you seem to think of nothing else."

"I am sure that's not true," the girl would answer, as she drew nearer to her offended lover, and laid her frank, warm clasp in his. "There is one person I think of a great deal more, Alick; but you cannot expect, dear, with Raymond and Rachel staying in the house, that we should be as often alone as when there was no one but mamma to interrupt us. You would not have them banished from the sitting-rooms, would you?"

"No; but you need not be appealing to Mrs. Norreys's opinion upon every subject, or running after your brother each time he leaves the room."

"That is not my custom, Alick," Christine would answer, proudly; "you are unfair."

"There you go, wanting to pick a quarrel with me again, Christine. I never hear you attack your new friends after that fashion. I believe you like them better than you do me. I suppose you are tired of me."

Christine was so used to give in in everything to the man before her, to consult his wishes, and to wait upon his will, that her mother, reared in a stricter school for propriety, was wont to say that she went too far sometimes, and that her assiduity to give him pleasure was unmaidenly. Christine did not mind such rebukes: she loved Alick Macpherson, and she liked to prove to him that she did so, by acquiescing in all he said or wished; but after that — knowing that as she did, it was hard to hear him speak as he had done, and bear it patiently; and patience was not one of Miss Norreys's virtues.

"That is not true," she would exclaim, "and you know it, Alick." And then one of the pitched battles I have alluded to would commence, and end by Mr. Macpherson jumping up and leaving the house, and Christine seeking the shelter of her own room in which to indulge her tears.

"And for such a little thing," she would repeat despondently, after each fresh outbreak on her lover's part; "our quarrels always seem to spring from nothing at all. I suppose I *must* be the one in the wrong; but Alick appears to me to come now-a-days armed with contradiction for everything one says. I *will* be more patient next time; I will listen to everything, and not answer a word, and then it will be impossible for him to fall out with me." And she would make fierce resolutions on the subject, only to break them the next time Mr. Macpherson appeared and recommenced his system of petty and uncalled-for reproach.

Rachel had found her weeping once or twice, and easily drew the reason from her; and, —

"What shall I do, dear Rachel?" Chris-

indifference, and she left the window and was seated, and affecting to make herself agreeable to Mr. Macpherson by the time that Raymond followed him into the room. Of the entrance of the latter she appeared not to take the slightest notice, though a close observer might have observed a certain nervous twitching of the lips which were addressing their conversation to Mr. Macpherson.

"Such a lovely day, has it not been? Did you only arrive just now? Have you seen Christine yet?"

"No, I have not," he replied. "Here is your husband, Mrs. Norreys, if you want to speak to him."

"She is in her bedroom, working," said Rachel, continuing the subject of her sister-in-law, "or was, when I last saw her. Shall I call her for you, Mr. Macpherson?"

He was quite taken aback by her unusual politeness, and stammered out something about having come to dinner, and begging her not to disturb Miss Norreys on his account. But Rachel swept past him and Raymond, and left the room without vouchsafing a look to the latter, although he had been absent since the morning.

It was nearly time to dress for dinner, and she did not meet her husband again until the whole party assembled in the dining-room. Then there appeared no difference between his behavior to her and that of Alick Macpherson: he might have been a gallant, attentive friend, and nothing more.

The conversation at dessert turned upon the subject of honor. There had been a question about it relative to some act of an acquaintance of the Norreyses, and the topic was freely commented upon by the whole party.

"But after all, what *is* honor?" exclaimed Raymond Norreys. "What one man calls by that name his neighbor denounces as dishonorable; and if we attend to the laws that society has framed for us in that respect, we shall never arrive at a satisfactory solution of the question."

Mr. Macpherson was about to prove, by some irrefragable argument of his own, that the only true and reliable code was the one that Scotchmen are guided by, when Rachel forestalled his intention of speaking.

"Surely," she said, and as if she appreciated her opportunity, for she admired her husband's powers of argument, and liked to draw him into a discussion, "that must be honor, Raymond, which each one of our consciences can assure ourselves in any case is the most straightforward, the wisest, and the best course to pursue."

"Not always," he replied. "An action may be perfectly open, very wise, and the best thing possible for ourselves, and yet very dishonorable towards another person."

"I don't understand you," she said, quickly.

[illegible] interested as herself in the discussion,

[illegible]er.

question, "may give him only half what she promises, or a quarter, or none; but as long as she stays beneath his roof the world dubs her an honorable wife. But she cheats him, nevertheless; and I have never heard that cheating comes under the head of an honorable action. Does it agree with your interpretation of the word, Rachel?"

He looked her full in the face as he put the question, and she could not return his glance or answer him; and she was most thankful when she heard the clear, untroubled voice of Christine raised in a playful rebuke.

"What nonsense you talk, Raymond! As if any one ever thought cheating honorable!"

"Well, I don't know," he rejoined; "I dare say there are plenty of such cheats in the world, who think themselves true men and women."

"Now my idea is, that real honor is embodied in the precept to render to every one his due."

It was Mrs. Norreys who had spoken, and Raymond answered her.

"Bravo, mother! I believe you have hit the right nail on the head, after all. 'To every one his due.' But then, people have such different ideas upon the subject."

The dinner was concluded, and as he spoke the ladies rose to leave the table, thereby greatly disappointing Mr. Macpherson, who had been silently preparing a most eloquent speech upon the matter in question, and had already been balked more than once of putting his ideas into words. As Raymond held the door open for the ladies, he tried hard to gain a peep at Rachel's face, to see what effect his words may have had upon her; but she passed him with downcast eyes, and there was no sign to be gathered from the long glories of her lowered lashes.

"What! going out again to-night, Raymond?" exclaimed Christine, reproachfully, half an hour later, as, Mr. Macpherson having returned to the drawing-room, she descried her brother in the hall, equipped evidently for an evening stroll. "If I were Rachel I would not allow you so much liberty."

Raymond made no reply. He was busily employed lighting his cigar by the hall lamp, and it was a work requiring skill. His wife was descending the staircase at the time; she did not make any remark upon his proposed absence, but coming forward, said, —

"Raymond, Major Craven was here this afternoon, and brought me a letter from his mother, asking us to go and stay at the Court as soon as we conveniently could. What answer shall I send?"

"Say we'll go," he replied, with his mouth full of cigar.

"I don't particularly wish to go," faltered Rachel.

"Oh, nonsense! — why not? Nice change for you. I should like to see Craven Court. Accept, by all means."

"Really, — are you serious?" she asked, earnestly.

"Certainly. What is your objection to the plan?"

"Oh, I have none, — that is, none in particular, — I do not much care," she replied, with a degree of hesitation. He saw she did not like the idea; but not to humor her was one of the rules he had laid down for himself, and so he said, with apparent indifference, —

"Well, if you don't care, *I do*. I should like it above all things; so consider it settled. We will fix the time to-morrow. *Au revoir*."

And Raymond sauntered out of her presence and the house, as if in all the world he had not a care to trouble him, his cigar between his lips, his whole appearance one of unstudied content.

And she looked after his retreating figure as the hall door slammed behind him, with her eyes fixed and her hands fast clasped together; and when he had vanished she gave one deep, long sigh, and then, half-frightened lest it had been overheard, fled back to the drawing-room and its company.

And Raymond, having slammed the door and skirted the covered pathway, turned before he passed through the iron gates, and paused a moment as he looked towards the lighted house. Where and to whom were his thoughts vandering as he cast that farewell upward glance? Did he long, as he did so, that his place also were there, inside that cheerful house, instead of in the stranger night, seeking false amusements to keep up the

show of falser pride. Any way, if it existed, he did not follow up his wish, for another second saw him in the crowded thoroughfare, and of the crowd, as the woman he thought of tried to make herself agreeable in his mother's drawing-room. She had no heart when there to reply to her sister-in-law's playful banter on her husband's absence, and threats that he was already tired of her. She had no spirit to play, or sing; and what she managed to accomplish in that way was flat, tame, and unprofitable. Her thoughts were too much with the letter in her pocket, and the wonderful idea, which she could not yet bring home to herself, that she was really going to pay a visit to Craven Court. For though she had made a private resolution against any such proceeding, she did not clearly see her way to carry out what she knew to be best and most prudent. She had no reasonable excuse to give Raymond for her dislike to the projected plan; indeed, apparently there was every cause existent why she should welcome the renewing of her intercourse with friends who had formerly been so kind to her. Therefore, since she might not speak, and could not lie, Rachel felt that the proposed visit was a part of her fate, and that, as it was impossible to avoid it, she must meet it as best she could. But how to meet it occupied all her thoughts; and wrapt in imaginary scenes and conversations, she was so lost in reveries all the evening, that Mr. Macpherson must have been amply satisfied, this night at least, with the non-interference of his flirtations with Christine. And Rachel, for her part, was equally glad when the prayer-bell startled her from her half-waking trance, and announced the approach of the time when she might retire to the solitude of her own room. But once there, she did not seem inclined to seek her bed. Having exchanged her evening attire for a loose dressing-gown, she rather appeared settling herself for an uninterrupted perusal of one of the novels which young ladies are so fond of studying at unearthly hours,—late at night, and early in the morning; for with her loosened hair in shaken masses down her shoulders, and her pretty little feet thrust into coquettish red slippers hoisted on another chair, Rachel sat herself down close by her dressing-table, and commenced to read;—not so attentively though, that the least sound in the now silent house could not fail to attract her notice; but none such came for nearly an hour more. Then a slight metallic noise was distinguishable below, as the pass-key that had opened the iron gates did the same office for the oaken door, and Raymond's footstep sounded in the hall.

Rachel laid down her book as it reached her ear, hastily blew out her candles, and colored painfully, although but in the dark. She heard it mount the stairs, pause for one little moment next her door, and then pass onward to the dressing-room. She did not move or make the smallest stir, but sat there, almost breathless, quite unoccupied, except in intently watching the ray of light which now found its way between the crevices of the partition which divided them. When that was gone—[illegible] Norreys, with a man's promptitude, did not take long to un[illegible], first leaving her slippers on the floor, and commenced to grope her way towards—her bed?—No! towards the door which parted [illegible] Raymond's! She seemed to know her way there well, too, [illegible] one naked foot before the other noiselessly upon the steps [illegible]. And when she reached it, Rachel did not pause, but placed her [illegible]ned, red lips—those fresh lips which Raymond had never yet dared to claim—upon the door, and sighing, "God bless you, Raymond!" left a kiss upon the hard unyielding wood, to consecrate her blessing. Ah! if he could but have seen and heard that which was being acted so near to him, how much unhappiness it might have spared them both! But Raymond was—if not already asleep—too unsuspecting and too drowsy to have caught so soft a whisper, and Rachel crept to her bed with an echo of her blessing on her lips, and slept beneath its influence till the morning.

CHAPTER XIX.

MAID BELOW AND MISTRESS ABOVE.

As Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper of Craven Court, sat in her own little room, about a fortnight or three weeks after the events related in my last chapter, there came a knock at her door. Now when Mrs. Watson had finished her arrangements for the Court dinner, seen that the dessert was tastefully laid out, and ordered a "little something hot" to be made ready for her own supper, she was used to retire from the cares of public life to the privacy of the housekeeper's room, and indulge in an afternoon nap; and when this was the case it never pleased her to be disturbed; for she was of a gross and corporeal nature, and given to somnolency; and the hirelings under her knew better than to rouse her from a state of drowsiness, for her ruffled temper made them remember the offence for the whole day afterwards, and was the cause of various raids on her part upon their private belongings and occupations, in order to fill up the spare time. Mrs. Watson had just composed herself for sleep in a huge arm-chair, with her front pushed to one side and a pocket-handkerchief spread over her face to keep off the flies, when the tap sounded at her door on the afternoon in question, and she was in anything but a beaming temper as she rose to unlock the entrance to her sanctum, and not in the least mollified when she perceived the intruder was Caroline Wilson, the mother of the new under-housemaid. "She wanted no mothers of her maids," as she had often said before, "a-coming bothering at all hours of the day, and prying into her treatment of them." So her voice was not exactly honeyed sweetness as she inquired,—

"Lor', Mrs. Wilson! what brings you here?"

"I took the liberty of stepping over, ma'am, to ask how you were, and to have a chat, if you've no objection," replied Caroline Wilson, who, not appearing to notice that the housekeeper's milk of human kindness had turned rather sour with the heat, entered the room as she spoke.

Mrs. Watson could not positively eject her visitor, and so she returned to her own seat, and replied,—

"Well, Mrs. Wilson, this is not my usual hour for seeing of friends, but if so be you have any reason for wishing to see me this afternoon, of course I won't say you no."

"You are very good, I'm sure," rejoined Mrs. Wilson, quietly seating herself; "you find this weather warm, ma'am, I dare say?"

"I do find it so; I don't deny it," said the housekeeper, whose face was the color of beet root, as she flapped her handkerchief against it for a fan. "Were you wanting to see your daughter, Mrs. Wilson?"

"No, ma'am, thank you; I saw her as I came in."

"Wanting to speak of her, may be?" was the next inquiry. Mrs. Watson was determined to get rid of her visitor at any cost.

"Well! I can't say but what I did come with the intention of saying a few words to you on the subject of Martha, Mrs. Watson. I hope she gives you satisfaction, so far."

"I haven't had occasion to find grevious fault with her yet, Mrs. Wilson; Martha ain't a bad gal by any means. She's young and flighty; but all girls are that. She does her work pretty well, though it's plain to see she hasn't been used to house-cleaning; but I've nothing in particular to say against her, Mrs. Wilson, ma'am, and that's the truth, excepting, perhaps, that I'd be better pleased if she didn't get such a sight of letters, for they always upsets a gal more or less; but lor'! it's a great charge, having them ten female servants under one, and I often feel as if it was breaking of me down;—the constant worry and talk that I have to keep them to their work—you wouldn't believe it, Mrs. Wilson!"

But Mrs. Wilson had an object in not discussing thus readily the topic she had introduced.

"*You don't find Martha* wanting too much leave, ma'am, do you?" she *next inquired.*

"She only gets her turn out, with the others," replied the housekeeper; "once every three Sundays they have half the day, and I find it's quite enough to unsettle them. Now I come to think of it, your gal did ask me for leave one day last week, and I refused it, and she had a bit of a cry; but they all does that directly they're crossed. I don't take no notice of them when such is the case."

"And she had a Sunday out the week before last?" rejoined Mrs. Wilson.

"I think she did," said Mrs. Watson. "I suppose 'twas the turn for the three housemaids; they generally go of a lot."

"Do you know where she went to, ma'am?"

The housekeeper's eyes and hands went heavenwards simultaneously.

"Lor' bless you, woman!" she exclaimed, forgetting her politeness in her surprise, "you don't suppose I can keep count of where they all go for their holidays. I should have a pretty piece of work of it if I did. I don't know where your gal went to; I didn't ask. She came back to her time. I supposed as you, her mother, was close at hand, that she'd go, maybe, and sit the afternoon with you. 'Twas nothing to me whether she did or no; I never dictate to my gals when they're once out of the house. They wouldn't mind me if I did. If they misbehave themselves, I turn 'em out."

"I hope my Martha will never do that, ma'am," said Mrs. Wilson, seriously. She felt serious; she had ascertained that Martha had had a holiday since she had been housemaid at the Court, and that she had spent it in London, no one knew where, or with whom—most probably in the same company she had gone up from Aldershot to join. Her mother instinctively guessed that there must be some love affair at the bottom of this secrecy; and she remembered her own experience, and trembled for her daughter. Only she did not go the right way to work to bring into subjection a self-willed, passionate girl, who had been used to act and think for herself.

"Might I ask you a favor, ma'am?" she said, after she had sat a few minutes in silent thought.

Mrs. Watson was not good at granting favors, but she replied, "Certingly, Mrs. Wilson; though I can't promise beforehand as it's yours."

"I only want you to be so kind as not to give my girl any leave, except at her regular times, and to tell her, as from yourself, ma'am, that she's not to have her holiday then if she doesn't spend it with me; for she's too young to be running about anywhere by herself."

Mrs. Watson felt as if the request was an imputation upon her capabilities as overseer of the morals of her maids, and answered accordingly; "Well, Mrs. Wilson, ma'am, I had no intention of giving your gal more holidays than other gals, but I've no objection to tell her so far as you've asked me to do, provided you don't expect me to see that Martha carries it out; for I have quite enough bother with them in-doors, and can't be expected to look after them when they're not under my eye."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Wilson; and thank you kindly, Mrs. Watson, for what you've promised. My daughter is as good a girl as ever was—that I believe; but she's young, and——"

"And I suppose you're afraid of her running after the men. Lor', Mrs. Wilson! you take my advice; let her run; 'tis their nature, and you can't stop it, try all you may. I've had seven daughters, ma'am, and I was so plaguey particular about the first three I wore my life out a-looking after them; but 'twasn't a bit of use. They had each of them a score or two of lovers before they could settle which to have, and as soon as I'd got 'em to give up one man they took to another; and so I fell sick of it, and let the four little ones do as they chose, and they made up their minds in half the time when they were left to themselves, and were married almost as soon as their sisters. It's no use fretting about a gal having lovers, ma'am. You might just as well try to bring 'em up without meat."

And to look at Mrs. Watson as she delivered herself of this opinion, one would have imagined she was the easiest-going, most lenient-tempered woman in the world. The fact is, she was exceedingly lazy, and made up for her own deficiencies by an occasional outburst of anger against her maids (as she had done in times past against her daughters) for the short-

comings which a little foresight and diligence on her own part, might have altogether prevented. But Caroline Wilson, with all her bad qualities, had the gift of circumspection, and too vivid a remembrance of the wrongs of her youth to contemplate her daughter falling into bad company with equanimity; so she only answered, —

"And your advice is very good, I'm sure, ma'am, and you deserved to settle your daughters well; but I have only got this one girl you see, and I'm afraid she might marry away from me — perhaps take a soldier, as I did (which is the greatest mistake a woman can make, Mrs. Watson), and leave her father and me for some of those horrid foreign stations."

"Well," rejoined her auditor, who began to feel drowsy again, "some day you must drop in, Mrs. Wilson, and tell me a little about them strange places as you've been to; but I'm sorry I can't ask you to stop this afternoon, as we've visitors coming to the Court to-day, and I've a great deal to do in consequence; for my mistress she never told me of them till this morning."

"Who may they be?" inquired Caroline Wilson, rising as she put the question.

"Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Norreys. Her name was Browne. When she was a little girl she was often here, running about the place."

"Lor'! — *she!*" exclaimed Mrs. Wilson.

"What, do you know her?" said the housekeeper, roused into curiosity by the other's surprise.

"Know her! — I should think I did," replied Mrs. Wilson; "her pa was in my regiment. Why, I lived with him (the doctor that was) till he died. And this Mrs. Norreys; — isn't she a queer one! — couldn't I tell you one or two things about her and your young gentleman up-stairs, Mrs. Watson!"

"*Never!*" exclaimed the housekeeper. "What, of she and Mr. Cecil? You don't say so?"

"Yes, I do," replied Mrs. Wilson, nodding her head oracularly. This last tremendous assertion had quite roused the housekeeper from her tendency to sleep: she was quite awake now, and her visitor began to assume an appearance not only of importance but of interest in her eyes.

"Lor', Mrs. Wilson!" she said, "you take my breath away! And Mrs. Craven, she seems to think such a lot of this young lady; she always did. 'The best bedroom, Watson, mind!' she says to me this morning; and then she gives me a pair of white and gold vases from her own dressing-room mantleshelf, and tells me to place them in the best bedroom, which has a couple of the loveliest candlesticks you ever see there already. Well, I never!"

"Ah! if she knew as much about her as *I* do!" said Mrs. Wilson, mysteriously.

"I suppose you couldn't stop to tea with me this evening, Mrs. Wilson, could you?" said the housekeeper, suddenly, and wonderfully interested in the person who a few minutes before she was trying her best to get rid of. "I haven't much to do up-stairs, after all, beyond giving the girls a few directions; and then we might have a quiet cup together, and drink to our better acquaintance. I think you are quite right with regard to what you said just now about your Martha, and you may be sure I shall take the first opportunity of speaking to her as you wish, and telling her that her days out are to be spent along of her mother; you may rest assured of that, Mrs. Wilson. And now you'll stop to tea with me, won't you? for it's stupid work, sometimes, sitting here alone, with not a soul to speak to, whilst Mr. Henderson is waiting above stairs."

"Well, I don't mind if I do," returned her visitor; "and thank you for the offer. Mrs. Watson. My mistress is here for the day, herself; and so, when I've just run back and given Miss Emily her tea, I sha'n't be wanted at home; and that I'll do at once."

"And don't be long," was the parting entreaty of her hostess, as Caroline Wilson proceeded to put her intention into execution.

She was burning to know what the sergeant's wife had to say about the expected visitor and her young master, and awaited her return with the *greatest impatience*. Mrs. Watson had lived in the Craven family for

many years; she had been there in the lifetime of the husband of her mistress, and many things had happened since then that she knew were strange, but that she could not understand. She had been surprised at Mrs. Craven's evident anxiety to promote the comfort of the coming guests, just as she had experienced the same feeling when Rachel Browne, as a little girl, paid visits to the Court, and was attended to as if she had been a princess royal. Now she felt quite anxious to impart all she knew on the subject to Mrs. Wilson, and hear what she had to say in return, in hopes that some connection might be traced between the stories about Cecil Craven and Mrs. Norreys, and the interest which his mother had ever taken in the daughter of her old friend and lover. And when Caroline Wilson reappeared, her tongue tipped with its best venom,—as it ever was when Rachel's name was under discussion,—you may be sure the two women enjoyed their cup of tea together and their dish of scandal to their hearts' content.

In the mean while, the drawing-room above was not without its occupants, nor they without their occupations. At the farther end of it, reclining in one of those pretty low chairs without arms, that show off a lady's dress to such advantage, close by one of the windows, and half hid by its lace curtains, was Lady Frances Morgan. At first sight she appeared to be alone, indulging in "maiden meditation," though not perhaps quite "fancy free;" but on closer inspection, a very light pair of trousers and a very light coat, surmounted by a very light head of hair and et ceteras, could be discerned behind the fellow-curtain, the contents of which (the "which" alluding to the coat and trousers) were supposed to be employed in helping to sort some lambs' wool, but in reality were busy in making sheep's eyes, which, after all, is only another and a pleasanter phase of the same occupation. Away from this amorous pair, and with her back towards them, sat Mrs. Arundel, the forlorn widow, who having consented to join the party at the Court for the first time a few days before, had already established herself on so free and easy a footing, that she appeared to be as much in Mrs. Craven's house as she was in her own. But to-day, of course, as her dear friend Mrs. Norreys was expected, she had made a point of being there to welcome her, and seeing that the subject pleased Mrs. Craven, had taken every opportunity that day to gush over in praise of the coming visitor, and to assure her that Rachel and herself had been as inseparable as sisters.

The mistress of Craven Court appeared that afternoon, to be the least at home of any there. She had not sat still for ten consecutive minutes during the entire day. Was it that the expectation of seeing Rachel Norreys brought the memory of the old days, when the girl's father had been her most faithful lover, too keenly for her peace, before this woman of the world? Could it be that Margaret Craven had loved that dead man better than she did any other out of the multitude of those who wooed her? Perhaps so,—but only perhaps,—Heaven knew best what secrets dwelt in Margaret Craven's breast, for to all outward show she lived without a confidant or comforter.

Expectation is seldom a pleasant work, and the whole party experienced relief when the wheels of the carriage, which had been sent to meet the Norreyses at the railway station, were heard approaching the house.

Mrs. Craven was in the drawing-room at the time, and, as the sound struck her ears, made a movement, but, checking herself, stood unmovable. Cecil started to his feet, and advanced to receive his mother's visitors; Lady Frances was all anticipation, and Mrs. Arundel had just exclaimed—"Here they are, at last, dear Mrs. Craven," when Rachel Norreys and her husband were in their midst. To the two who knew Rachel best, it was very evident that she had been suffering on her way to Craven Court, for there was a peculiar wild look in her eyes which never appeared there unless her mind was harassed. But Lady Frances and her hostess saw nothing, except the graceful little figure, the large liquid orbs, and the look of startled uncertainty, which always gave Rachel, on finding herself amongst strangers, that deer-like appearance which was one of the most striking of her personal characteristics.

She advanced towards Mrs. Craven first, as in duty bound, with a timid

gesture, as if uncertain what reception, after these many years, she should receive at her hands; and the hostess appeared almost as bashful as her visitor. But it was only the uncertainty of a moment; in another, Rachel was folded in her arms, and embraced with almost a mother's fervor.

"My *dear* child!" was the warm greeting she received, "I am so delighted to have you here; I have never forgotten your little face since we parted last!" In her pleasure at seeing again the daughter of her old friend, in the mixed feelings that Rachel experienced at this reception from Cecil's mother, they both seemed to have forgotten the existence of the other members of the party. But Mrs. Craven, remembering herself, held out her hand with a smile over Rachel's shoulder, to greet Rachel's husband, saying, —

A thousand welcomes, Mr. Norreys — for this dear girl's sake!" and then Rachel disengaged herself, and proffered hers for Cecil's acceptance. The firm pressure with which he held it told her how much he felt with her; but she had barely time to return it, and to make a graceful acknowledgment of the introduction which Lady Frances received at Mrs. Craven's hands, when there was an exclamation, a rush forward, a fervent embrace, and Rachel knew she was in the arms of her bosom friend.

"Chere petite!" exclaimed that lady, who found her abominable French beginning to be useful again. "What pleasure to see you again, my darling Rachel! What happy days we shall have together! Ah! I dare say you little thought to meet your poor Elise at the Court, now did you? but you shall hear all about it in good time. I dare say you are tired to death just now, after your railway journey. Let me take you to your room, dearest." And Mrs. Arundel appeared as confident of this being the right thing for her to do, as if Craven Court and all its belongings were her property alone. Mrs. Craven commenced something to the effect that she would not hear of her taking that trouble upon herself; but the widow interrupted her in the midst of her speech.

"Now, dear Mrs. Craven, in this particular I must just have my own way. You've been trotting about all day and are quite tired out. No! *no! no!* I will not hear of it. You see I can be very obstinate when I choose. Now, dearest Rachel, I know all about your room, and if you'll follow me, I will take you to it."

Rachel was half disposed to remonstrate against this hasty proceeding, but glancing towards Mrs. Craven, the latter said, —

"Perhaps you had better go, my dear, as your friend is so kind as to offer to show you the way. We dine at six, and your boxes have yet to be unpacked. Cecil will show Mr. Norreys to his dressing-room;" but as Rachel left the room she caught a glimpse of the faces of Cecil and Lady Frances, and they were both replete with unmitigated disgust at the officiousness of Mrs. Arundel.

"Fancy whisking Mrs. Norreys off in that fashion," pouted Lady Frances in a whisper to Major Craven, "when I wanted so much to speak to her!"

"You shall have plenty of opportunities to do so if I can manage them," he whispered, in reply; "for I'll get that widow out of the house by hook or by crook, or my name's not Craven." For these two had already established a regular feud against Mrs. Arundel, which only had the effect, however, of making her more bitter against them than she would have otherwise been, and more determined to have her revenge. As she got Rachel safely into the blue damask bedroom, Mrs. Arundel began to be communicative.

"Well, darling! so you've come at last. I really thought that you were never going to give us that pleasure. Isn't this a charming place? but I suppose you remember it. Such grounds, and such a table! I'm here almost every day. Now don't you be jealous, you naughty puss; but dear Mrs. Craven *will* have it so, and I am not in a condition to refuse an offer of friendship like hers. Not but what I shall *always, always* love my sweet Rachel the best of all my friends. Well, dear Rachel, how are you getting on at Brompton with la belle mere, and la belle sœur? to say nothing of Monsieur votre mari? Tolerably, eh? No pitched battles, etc.?"

If Rachel had been engaged in such, Mrs. Arundel was no longer the person she would have chosen to confide in, so she merely answered:

"No, indeed; I should hope not. You speak of pitched battles, Elise, as if they were nothing. I like Abbey Lodge exceedingly, thank you; and my mother and sister-in-law are very good to me, and very kind. Christine is a dear girl."

"That's right; that's right, petite," I thought it would all turn out plain-sailing after awhile. You see your Elise knew best, after all, did she not?"

But Rachel appeared in no mood for confidence, for she turned the subject.

"How do you like Laburnum Cottage, Elise?"

"Pretty well, dear; it's a poor little place, but as much as I can afford to keep up. You must come and see it. *Your friend*, Master Cecil, has not honored me with a visit yet. By-the-by, have you remarked how very epris he is with Lady Frances?"

"I have had no time to remark anything," replied Rachel. "She seems a very pretty girl."

"Oh, yes; she is all very well for those who like neither one thing nor the other; however, for *my* part, give me either a regular blonde or a brunette—like our two selves, for instance. However, Major Craven is carrying on a great flirtation in that quarter, any way. Rather a fickle gentleman, is he not?"

"Is he?" said Rachel, carelessly.

"Well, I should have thought *you* ought to have known, my dear," was the flippant reply. All her jealousy of, and desire to supplant Rachel in the heart of Cecil Craven the widow had now transferred to Lady Frances; and she had rather hoped that Rachel would feel Major Craven's desertion as much as she had done herself, and with an amiable feeling, peculiar to women, wanted to rouse her jealousy of him as well.

"Watch them, my dear Rachel, that's all, and you will soon see their little game. Not that I believe Craven means anything by it (more shame for him); but she's a little fool, and very easily taken in. Well, I must be running away now, for the first dressing-bell has rung, and I promised dear Mrs. Craven to look in and help her with her hair; such beautiful hair as she has, for a woman of her age, has she not, dear? and I dare say I am keeping *il marito* a prisoner in his dressing-room all this time into the bargain, when, perhaps, he has a thousand things to say to you—so, au revoir, dearest."

And with this last pleasantry the widow disappeared. The news she had imparted to Rachel about Cecil and Lady Frances had no further effect upon her than to make her thoughtful.

"I *shall* watch them," she said to herself, "and see whether what Elise imagines to be the case is true; she may be mistaken. At all events, I cannot think that Cecil would be so ungentlemanly, so dishonorable, so cruel, as to play with any girl's feelings. And if he is in earnest, and intends to marry Lady Frances, I will try—she looks so sweet and amiable—to make her love me, and to be her friend." And with this resolve, having dressed herself for dinner, Rachel opened the door of her bed-chamber and stepped into the passage. It was a wide corridor, running the whole length of the Court, and with doors opening upon either side. As she commenced to traverse it she saw Cecil Craven standing at the further end.

"I was waiting for you, Rachel," he said, frankly, as he advanced to meet her. "I want to thank you, oh! so much, for being such a dear, good girl, and doing as I asked."

As she stood before him, robed in her black dress, how low sank the beauty of other women before the bewitching graces of this aristocratic-looking girl! Even the outlines of Lady Frances appeared clumsy in Cecil's thoughts, as he watched Rachel nervously trying to button a glove upon her small symmetrical hand.

"You *ought* to thank me," she replied in a low voice, "for it has been a great effort."

"I am sure of it," he exclaimed; "it could not be otherwise; and you did it for *my* sake, Rachel, did you not?" And he passed his arm round her waist as he spoke.

"*Yes,*" she replied. "I did it for your sake, dear Cecil, and in return

for all your goodness to me. I have come," she added, with a degree of agitation, "as you asked me to come, but there I feel as if my responsibility ended. You must do the rest for me, Cecil. I am afraid of myself in this house; afraid of you—of everybody. I feel as if I should scarcely ever be able to speak, or dare to do so. Do what you can for me; ward off everything that may prove a temptation. I have promised, I know; but Cecil, I am only a woman. Away, I felt strong; here, I am a very child. By nature I am weak, and rash, and hasty. Be my protector, as you have promised to be, in this as in other things."

"I will, indeed I will," he answered fervently, as he kissed the tears from her eyes. "Look to me, dear Rachel—come to me when you want strength. I am often driven to bay myself, and scarcely know what to do or say; but there is but one course for our pursuance—an oath is sacred."

"I know it," she said, solemnly; I *feel* it; but the alternative is hard. Oh, father! what is this burden you have laid upon me?"

As she uttered the last words, in a low and plaintive voice, Cecil Craven pressed her more closely to him, and was silent.

The next moment they were descending the wide staircase at a respectful distance from each other, for Raymond Norreys had left his dressing-room, and was advancing to join them.

"I am telling your wife that I shall be able to give you some good shooting here, if you like the sport, Norreys," observed Major Craven.

"Indeed," remarked Raymond Norreys, dryly; and then added in a pleasanter tone, "I saw you had splendid covers about here as we drove in from Weybridge."

"Yes, and they are just overflowing with game," replied Cecil; they have been strictly preserved during my absence, and my cousin Northland's is the only gun I have allowed there: we will go out to-morrow." And the two gentlemen engaged in a learned dissertation upon dogs, shot, and guns, as they descended the staircase and entered the drawing-room together.

CHAPTER XX.

A MYSTERY SOMEWHERE.

There was a gentleman there whom Rachel did not remember to have seen before, although she had often done so in the days of her childhood, and a very strange gentleman she thought him to be, for he kept bobbing about from behind one lady's skirt to another, as soon as she turned her eyes in his direction, as if he wished to avoid an introduction to her. Cecil and Raymond were so busy talking together that the former did not seem to notice anything, and it was not until Mrs. Craven appeared to join her guests that the behavior of the strange gentleman was commented upon.

"Gus," she said, as soon as she entered the room, and saw him apparently trying to hide himself, "Cousin Gus, have you not shaken hands yet with your little friend Rachel Norreys and her husband?"

Then the strange gentleman advanced, and giving a hasty salutation to Rachel, turned to Raymond, and almost fastened upon his hand.

"I knew your father, sir, I am exceedingly glad to make your acquaintance! I knew your father years ago; we were boys at school together, and lads at college, and I am exceedingly pleased to see you here, Mr. Norreys, by Jove, I am, and—I knew your father so very well. You are very like him." And then he set to shaking poor Raymond's hand again, until it was nearly shaken off. Meanwhile the dinner was announced, and the formalities of society began.

"Cecil, my dear," said Mrs. Craven, "you will take Mrs. Norreys if you please, and——"

"*That* sounds funny, doesn't it, Rachel?" he whispered, as he took her on his arm, and led the way into the dining-room.

They were quite alone, with the exception of Mrs. Arundel, and the dinner passed off very quietly. Rachel did not talk much; she felt unaccountably timid and reserved, and all efforts to draw her into conversation failed.

although Cecil was at her right hand. The ones who talked the most appeared to be Cousin Gus and Raymond Norreys, who kept up famously, and Mrs. Arundel, whose tongue ran incessantly as she alternately addressed Mrs. Craven and Rachel. The latter would not have been so silent but for one circumstance, which occurred so often that it was a source of positive distress to her, and this was, that whenever she raised her eyes from her plate, she found those of the strange gentleman (whose name she had now gathered from her right-hand neighbor to be Mr. Northland) invariably fixed upon her. He always appeared painfully conscious when thus caught — would almost blush in his feeling of awkwardness, and hurriedly withdrawing his gaze, apply himself to eating and talking with such renewed energy, that being in general rather an uncommunicative individual, he quite astonished his relatives. Still the next time that Rachel raised her eyes the same result was sure to ensue, till she grew quite nervous and blushed a great deal more than he did. Once she thought she encountered the eyes of Mrs. Craven turned with displeased surprise upon her offending cousin, but if so, Mr. Northland did not appear to take the hint, for he still continued to stare at the new guest. And somehow, although it confused her, Rachel could not feel very angry at the interest she seemed to have awakened in his breast. The glances he directed towards her were so very far from anything like impertinent curiosity, that they only excited her sympathy in return. His large, soft, brown eyes were so pensive and womanlike in their expression, his whole demeanor so subdued and melancholy, that she began to experience a feeling of compassion for the stranger before she was aware of it. She thought that she should like to know him better; to ask him why he looked at her so earnestly; to learn if he had any grief, or had experienced some great loss of which her face reminded him. She smiled to herself when occasionally roused from such reveries by Cecil or Mrs. Arundel, to think that she should be dreaming of fanciful probabilities respecting a man she had hardly seen before, and of whom she knew nothing. All this time Rachel had spoken very little to Mrs. Craven, or she to her. The spell of silence had fallen upon the hostess also, and she had scarcely joined in the conversation. But when the ladies had retreated to the drawing-room, and Mrs. Arundel, in order to keep up her character of a loving mother, had affirmed that she must run home "just for *one* moment to see her sweet Emily safely to bed, if *dear* Mrs. Craven would kindly excuse her," and Lady Frances had wandered upon the terrace at the back of the house, in hopes somebody might see and join her there, Rachel found herself for the first time alone with Mrs. Craven.

She tried to overcome her shyness and appear at ease, and, attempted to say something; but the "something" fell flat, and then there was a dead silence between them — broken, however, by Mrs. Craven, who, advancing to the sofa where Rachel sat, and taking a seat beside the girl, laid her hand upon hers.

"I hope you are glad to come here, my dear," she said, softly. "I knew your dear father many, many years ago — indeed, before you were born, Rachel, and it was a great grief to me to hear of his death. It must have been a great grief to you, my dear."

"Indeed it was," faltered poor Rachel. "I sometimes feel as if I should never get over it."

"Don't say that," said Mrs. Craven. "You are young, my dear child, and the young soon forget. But he was very kind and good to me in days when we were boy and girl together, and I wish that I could in some measure make up to you, for his loss. If you could look on me as on ——"

"Oh, no! — oh, no!" exclaimed Rachel, shrinking from her, and hiding her face in her hands, "I couldn't, indeed."

Mrs. Craven uttered a sharp sound, which was almost like a cry.

"Oh, don't shrink from me!" she said; "I did not mean to hurt your feelings. I do not suppose you could ever look on me as you have done on him."

"*Oh no, indeed,*" said Rachel, her face still hidden from the lamplight, "*not on you, or on any one!*"

"*I do not expect it,*" replied Mrs. Craven; "but if you could look on me

as a friend, Rachel, as your best friend, and promise to apply to me in any trouble, I should be so happy thus to try and pay off part of the great debt I owe his memory. You have no mother, dear child."

"God knows that I have not!" said the girl, sobbing; and her sudden distress seemed greatly to affect her friend.

"Poor, poor child!" she exclaimed, putting her arm around her. "Let me be your mother, Rachel, for *his* sake! I have no daughter." (As she said the words the girl stirred in her embrace uneasily.) "If I had I should have liked her to be just like yourself; and having none, and seeing you thus, I feel as if I could love you almost as well as if you had been mine. May I love you, Rachel? May I please myself sometimes by fancying that you are my daughter, and that the day may come when you will look on me as you might have done on your own mother, had she lived?"

"She never lived for me," said Rachel, sadly, though her sobs had ceased.

"I know she did not, Rachel; therefore never having known another, it will be all the easier for you to look on me as such. Is it a bargain?"

"I will *try* to love you," was the reply, "I cannot promise more."

Mrs. Craven appeared to be satisfied with the agreement, and kissed her several times in return. Yet this conversation did not make Rachel's timidity, in the presence of the woman who wished to be her friend, less. Indeed, as the days went on, notwithstanding all Mrs. Craven's endeavor to the contrary, it rather seemed to increase than to diminish.

She shrunk from all attention offered her. She frequented her own apartment very much, and when below stairs was shy, silent, and retiring. Especially did she seem to dread being left alone in Mrs. Craven's company, and the slightest signal of such a calamity was sufficient to send Rachel flying out of the room into the garden or up the stairs, — anywhere, to avoid a *tete-a-tete*. This conduct was observed not only by Mrs. Craven, to whom it gave great pain, but also by Cecil and Mrs. Arundel and Raymond Norreys. But at this time Rachel suffered alone. If she shrunk from giving her confidence to her hostess, she shrunk as much from her ci-devant bosom friend, Eliza Arundel; for in her heart, with regard to that lady, there was springing up a seed of distrust, — small, indeed, but still there, and incompatible with anything like unreserve. And to her husband Rachel was becoming a mystery. He could understand her former indifference, and even dislike of him; but he could not imagine what should make her now appear nervous and anxious to avoid him who never pressed his company upon her. What should induce her to blush and falter when she spoke to him; to tremble if he came upon her suddenly; to indulge (as he knew she did) in long fits of weeping by night, and melancholy depression by day? He attributed these signs to her longing to be free from the yoke he had imposed upon her; her aversion to his presence; her despair at the impossibility of regaining her freedom. These thoughts hung heavily upon the heart of Raymond Norreys. Night after night, when his wife imagined he was asleep in his dressing-room, would he be sitting listening to the sobs she tried to stifle with the bedclothes, and to the pacing of her naked feet upon the carpet, — longing to rush in and comfort her, but not daring to do so, as he thonght he was the cause of her distress. How often he cursed the fate which led him on to enchain the heart and hand of so inexperienced a girl, only to find that what he had secured, though worth nothing, was yet that which neither he nor she could rid themselves of again. If he could have shattered those rivets for her, how soon he would have done it, even had his own heart withered in the process. But they were forged, and no amount of strength nor force of longing could undo the link. It never struck Raymond that Rachel's depression arose not so much from her dislike of himself as her preference for another. He was too honorable, too upright in his own nature, to suspect his neighbor of faults he would have scorned to commit himself. The best and the truest in the world are always those who are easiest hoodwinked. The man who suspects his wife or his friend at every turn requires looking after himself; and Raymond Norreys was both good and true.

And yet it was to Cecil Craven, and him alone, that Rachel at this time even admitted that she suffered pain, and he (notwithstanding that he was greatly engrossed in his flirtation with Lady Frances) could not help observing, in common with the rest, that her eyes often told tales of her sleepless, restless nights, and that her spirits were not at their usual ebb. And when he noticed the circumstance to her she never denied it.

"Of course I am unhappy," she would say, "and you know the reason why, Cecil. Leave me alone, and take no notice of me; it is the kindest thing you can do. I shall be better when I get back to Brompton."

But Rachel was not so totally absorbed in her own troubles as to be unable to take notice of what was going on around her, and one or two things which she observed during her visit to Craven Court puzzled her not a little. Foremost amongst these was Mrs. Craven's treatment of her son. If she had simply idolized Cecil, Rachel would have thought it only natural; and if she lavished presents without number or reserve upon him, it would still have appeared the most likely thing to happen, possessing the wealth that she did. But, without evincing the first clause, Mrs. Craven carried the second to an extravagant excess. Major Craven had a liberal income of his own, — an income which made poorer men wonder why on earth he continued in the army when he might enjoy himself at home. But people's ideas of enjoyment differ, and Cecil's was to follow his profession. Whilst in it, he was celebrated for being the most extravagant officer in the Bays. He had always kept the most valuable horses, given the best dinners and the most expensive presents of any one in that corps, and, when on leave in England, his mode of living far exceeded in splendor anything which his foreign services could boast of. But Mrs. Craven, instead of checking him in his expenditure, only appeared to encourage him in fresh extravagances, by heaping useless luxuries upon him, and, as far as Rachel could see, without any object in thus indulging him.

Cecil Craven had procured mounts for Lady Frances and Rachel Norreys, and a riding party being organized, the four younger people took that exercise almost daily. On such occasions Mr. Northland being generally absorbed in his meerschaum and dressing-gown, and lost in some of the surrounding shrubberies or garden-paths, Mrs. Arundel would be Mrs. Craven's only companion, and strove to make the time pass quicker by engaging her friend in innocent small-talk.

"How do you think dear Rachel is looking to-day, Mrs. Craven," she commenced, at one of these conferences, "better?"

"Is Rachel Norreys ill?" Mrs. Craven questioned.

"Well, not precisely ill, perhaps, but certainly far from what she should be. She was very different formerly. I have known the dear girl for years, Mrs. Craven, and she used to be such a merry, light-hearted creature."

"I have often had her to stay here as a little girl," Mrs. Craven replied, "and always thought her disposition subject to very fitful changes. Sometimes she was boisterously rude; at others, unnaturally quiet and shy. I never attributed it to anything but her temperament, which is very excitable."

"Ah! perhaps so. As a child I knew nothing of her, of course; but as a woman I have associated with her a great deal. Oh, Mrs. Craven! you should have seen us at Gibraltar, — we were inseparable, — riding, driving, or walking, your dear son, dear Rachel, and myself were like brother and sisters. One would have thought to see us we were *just that* — brother and sisters."

Her listener started at the idea of such a sister for her Cecil as the woman before her, but she only answered, —

"Indeed!"

"Yes, indeed; and if dear Rachel had not been a married lady, I should have been just a little afraid for Major Craven's heart."

Mrs. Craven started again, laid her hand upon the widow's arm, and exclaimed, —

"Oh! Mrs. Arundel, pray don't say that!"

The innocent creature laughed lightly.

"*My dear Mrs.* Craven, pray don't look so frightened. I only said, 'if

Rachel had not been married; but she was, and so there *could* be no danger. Why, fie! you look quite pale. I'm very naughty to have alarmed you so."

And indeed Mrs. Craven did look quite pale and overcome from the thought which the widow's words had suggested to her.

"I talk too fast for you," re-commenced that lady, "but you must never think much of anything I say. We military ladies are famous for being rattles, you know. But now that I have said so much, perhaps I had better finish my little talk, and then you will see what small cause there was for alarm. Dear Rachel was married very young, you see, and left many years without her husband (who I am sure is a most charming fellow now he's come), and I *must confess*, at *one* time I was just a *little* afraid lest Mr. Cecil's handsome face and figure might not be productive of mischief in that quarter (for a woman's heart is an easy prey, dear Mrs. Craven); but I talked to her once or twice—and—. There,—that's all, my dear friend; Rachel is a sweet girl, devoted to me, and a word to her from my mouth has more effect than twenty would from another person. At any rate, no harm was done. Mr. Norreys arrived, claimed his pretty little wife, Major Craven returned home and commenced to court Lady Frances Morgan, and here they all are, as happy as can be."

Here the widow sighed profoundly, as though even in thinking of happiness she dared not trust herself; but there was a devil in the eye to which she gently applied her pocket-handkerchief. Yet artful as she was herself, she was quite taken aback by the show of gratitude which Mrs. Craven exhibited on account of the salvation of her son.

With her eyes brimful of tears, she seized the hand of Eliza Arundel, and kissed her.

"God bless you!" she said, fervently, "for what you did for both of them. You have been a friend indeed."

Mrs. Arundel tried to laugh off her confusion at receiving this little homage. "Why, my dear," she exclaimed, "you don't suppose that anything could happen to dear Rachel whilst *I* was by, do you? And really there was nothing to speak of, after all. Rachel is but a thoughtless girl, you know, and very careless of the world's opinion; so, perhaps, is Mr. Cecil, but I don't think it was much talked of."

"Good heavens! it never came to be talked of, did it?" said Mrs. Craven, horror-struck at the idea.

"No, no, dear friend; or if so, soon forgotten. In a regiment every little trifle is discussed, but do not be afraid for our dear Rachel. I, myself, I know, was over-anxious and fidgety about the matter, and yet I can laugh at it now, you see. But I positively won't talk to you another minute on the subject, so let us change it at once. How do you like Mr. Norreys?"

"Very much indeed," returned poor Mrs. Craven. "He seems a delightful young man, from the little I have seen of him; so animated and full of talk, and very attentive to his wife."

"Ah! so *I* said directly I saw him, and how I had to talk to, and scold that naughty little Rachel, to be sure, for the way she used to go on about that poor fellow before he had even returned."

"Not in abuse of him, I hope?" Mrs. Craven said, with renewed anxiety.

The widow smiled. "Well, I suppose we mustn't say ladies 'abuse' a gentleman when they speak against him; but she was a very naughty, self-willed girl, and used to get into a dreadful state of mind whenever his name was alluded to. But nous avons change tous cela. They seem very happy together now."

"Do they?" said Mrs. Craven, thoughtfully. "Poor Rachel!"

"Now, my dear friend," resumed her tormentor, "you must not let my little Rachel know that I have mentioned these things to you, or my pet will be angry with me, and that is what I could not bear. Promise me that you will be discreet."

"Certainly I will," replied Mrs. Craven. "In the first place I have not Rachel's confidence; and, in the second, would not think of wounding her feelings unnecessarily if I had. But here they come from their ride."

From that day Mrs. Craven threw every obstacle that she possibly could in the way of Rachel Norreys joining the riding-party; at the same time that she tried as much as lay in her power to further her son's intimacy with Lady Frances Morgan. The two latter were very anxious that a dance at the Court should be given, and Mrs. Craven was desirous of obliging them; but a difficulty lay in the way, in the shape of Rachel Norreys, who had been promised, if she would accept the invitation, that no festivity should take place there during her stay, in consideration of her deep mourning. But it was now going on three months since Dr. Browne died, and Rachel was no stickler for outward forms and ceremonies. She attached no importance whatever to the depth of her mourning, and thought the whole system of wearing black, in most cases, abused. She did not feel inclined for a dance herself, because her heart was still very sore, and so she told her hostess; but, rather than prevent the other young people having their enjoyment, would certainly appear at any entertainment which was given at the Court; and as she was a guest in the house, Mrs. Craven could not have issued cards for one otherwise. But, in compliment to her, it was agreed that the dance should only be a "carpet hop," and follow a dinner-party; by that means, appearing less of a pre-arranged festivity than it would otherwise have done. And Mrs. Craven, in settling all this, and talking to Rachel about it, was so considerate of her feelings, and so tender in her mention of her dead father, that her kindness overcame the girl, who burst into tears. Contrary to her late avoidance of her hostess, they happened that day to be alone, and Rachel could not hide her distress.

"My dear child!" exclaimed her friend, "if the mere thought of it gives you such pain, it shall certainly not be. Consider that settled."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Craven!" was the hysterical answer; "it isn't that, indeed. It is nothing to me if they dance or sing or play, so long as *he* is not there. It was only your mentioning his name so kindly that overcame me for a moment. I am all right again now;" and she sat up and passed her hand across her brow, as if she was determined not to break down again.

Notwithstanding the evident restraint which had been lately evinced in the girl's manner towards herself, Mrs. Craven could not but make another attempt to comfort her and gain her confidence.

"My dear Rachel," she said, tenderly, "it makes me very unhappy to see you so. You nurse your grief too much, my dear; you pass bad nights, I can see, and allow sad thoughts to haunt you by day. In losing your father, I know you lost what you most cared for; but, after all, death is not the greatest affliction that can befall our dear ones, and Heaven never intended the young to weep long for the old. Try to think more of his happiness, my child, and less——"

"It is not that—it is not that at all!" said Rachel, interrupting her with convulsive sobs. "Oh, Mrs. Craven, it is *not* that!"

"Will you not then tell me what it is, dear Rachel?" continued her kind friend, drawing nearer to her; "perhaps if you did, I might be able to comfort you. It has given me pain to see how you avoid me, although I asked your leave to let me look upon you as a daughter, and I feel,—believe me, Rachel, I *really* feel, *almost* as if I were your mother. If you could confide in me, as you would have done in him who is gone, I might be able to disperse some of the cloud which hangs over you at present; at all events, you would feel that you were deeply sympathized with, from whatever source your trouble springs. What is it, dearest child? Tell me."

But there was no answer to the question, except those deep, deep sobs, which rose from the sofa cushion, where Rachel had buried her face.

"Is it anything to do with your home, Rachel? Anything about your husband?"

Still no reply.

"Is it about Raymond, Rachel? You married him too young, my child. *Do you love him?*

The question had never been put to Rachel before by any friend in Eng-
d. Mrs. Norreys and Christine had taken it for granted that she did so,
Arundel that she did not; and Raymond himself had never mooted

the idea since the first night they had met, and she had answered, "*No!*" But coming as it did now, from almost alien lips, and yet with a true, tender pathos in the inquiry, it seemed to go straight home to the girl's heart. It seemed to force its way there, and make her ask herself the reason of her present trouble; of the new strange feelings which had crept upon her the last few weeks; of her anxiety, her restlessness, her resentment of her husband's coldness, and thence to wrest a true and honest answer.

And so uplifting her slight form from the sofa-cushion, only to throw it down again with a fresh burst of grief as she thought how little Raymond regarded her, the cry of Rachel was,—

"Oh, yes—indeed, I do—indeed, indeed, I do, with all my heart and soul!"

CHAPTER XXI.

MR. NORTHLAND BECOMES PARTICULAR.

No, she did not lie, although, until that moment when the question was asked her so abruptly, Rachel had had no knowledge of the truth. But she knew now why she felt Raymond's indifference to her so bitterly, and doubly bitter it became after the discovery; she knew why she trembled and shuddered at his approach, and had thought the agitation came from the same feelings of aversion which she had entertained for him upon their first acquaintance. She knew,—she felt she *loved* him; and knowing that, how far more lovable did he appear in her enlightened eyes. Filled with the sunshine that had burst in upon her soul, she began to fear lest Raymond should read by it her heart as plainly as she did herself; and, fearing so, became more timid in his presence than she had ever been before. But Mrs. Craven knew nothing of all this. When Rachel's assurance to her that she loved her husband, breaking so honestly and fervently from her lips, sounded on the ears of Cecil's mother, she raised her eyes to Heaven, and returned thanks. Her fears were thenceforth at an end for both of them, and the widow must have been in the right when she said that the young married couple seemed happy enough together now. She asked no more confidences from her young guest; she had learnt all that concerned herself and hers. Rachel loved her husband, and Cecil loved Lady Frances, and the grief of the former was a daughter's filial grief for the loss of a father, and time would cure it as it did all things. The elder lady rose from that interview restored to her former cheerfulness, and ready to go through all the necessary preparations for the grand dinner and dance to be given during the ensuing week; the younger one flew to her own room, afraid lest she had said too much, or that what she had disclosed, however trivial, might find its way back to the ears of Raymond; and overpowered with the burden of this new delicious secret, which, while it oppressed her with remorse and shame for her past conduct, opened such delicious glimpses of a happy life in the future before her eyes, that she could not but love the lovely fancy, and hug it rapturously to her breast.

But then the thought would flash across her mind that some day she would have to tell Raymond of the change in her own feelings (for with her happiness came the longing to make him happy also), and she would shrink from the idea, and blush crimson, even if by herself, at the bare fancy of having to do such a thing. Sometimes she argued that she must write it; but oh,—not yet,—not for a very long time to come! And then she would compose the words in which to tell her husband that she would be his wife; and suddenly remembering that he had said he would have it from her mouth alone, and read the truth of the assertion in her eyes,—would thrust away the notion of telling it at all, as if she had been called upon to disclose her secret in a public crowd.

At other moments she was still more deeply despondent than before, and would *cry to herself* in the night that Raymond loved her once,—ha'

to love her; but by her coldness she had killed such feelings in his heart, and that till they died they must be friends, and nothing more. And as she recalled his looks, his words, his smiles upon that first day that they met, and several occasions subsequently, and compared them with the cool and caustic manner in which he now behaved to her, she would really believe that she had been the means of uprooting anything like affection for herself from his breast, and that thenceforth it would be barren. Or he might love another, — such things had been; and at the thought, Rachel would turn upon her solitary pillow and moan; whilst she felt that in such an awful contingency she could have strength and courage to rush between them, and thrust that hated, ideal woman away from Raymond's clasp, whilst she told him, with tears of contrition, that she loved him, — him only, — better than all the world beside. But would he hear her then, even if she knelt at his feet or grovelled in the earth before him? Would it not be too late? And then poor Rachel would be for hurrying into his presence and confessing her sin before him, until false shame and pride would force her back into her bed, to pass the remainder of the night in tears and dreadful wonderment how this would end. But how much at this period of her life the girl needed the advice and counsel of a man like Raymond, and sometimes even his protection, the incident which follows will substantiate!

It was the afternoon on which the dance and dinner-party were to be given at Craven Court, and Rachel, acting up to the wish which she continued to exhibit for solitude, had wandered away from the house into the shady, grand old shrubberies that surrounded the Court, thick with verdure of many years' growth, and laid out with beautifully kept gravel-paths. Here and there were little winding paths leading away from the principal walk, and up to unexpected grassy knolls, crowned by benches, backed by trees, and looking over the deer-park and towards the Court itself. These secluded retreats were Rachel's delight; and she would often steal away, book in hand, to one or other of them, and sit reading by the hour, whilst parties from the house were constantly traversing the flower-gardens and wooded paths without discovering her whereabouts.

On the afternoon in question my heroine left Mrs. Craven busily superintending the arrangement of certain flags and flowers with which workmen were decorating the dancing-room, her friend, Mrs. Arundel, quietly working in the drawing-room, and Cecil and Lady Frances, as usual, lingering beside the uncleared luncheon-table, in order to enjoy their flirtation undisturbed. Raymond had disappeared, she knew not whither, and Mr. Northland's absence was too common an occurrence to excite the least surprise; so Rachel strolled out with one of Thackeray's "Miscellanies" in her hand, prepared to spend a quiet afternoon on one of her favorite benches.

It was a beautiful day, although the summer had departed. Rachel passed the first mysterious little labyrinth, winding away amongst the taller shrubs, and the second, and turned into the third, close by the bed of rhododendrons. Mr. Northland was there, quietly enjoying his pipe in supposed security. As soon as he saw her, Mr. Northland started from the iron bench and commenced to apologize. Rachel started backward, and was about to do the same, but laughed in the attempt instead, and then formality between them was at an end. Cousin Gus insisted upon vacating the sanctum, but Rachel would not hear of such a thing, nor would she stay herself unless he went on smoking, so at last they came to a compromise, and she sat herself down upon the other end of the seat and entered into conversation with him.

She was rather glad to have found him there, for although she shunned the society of her friends, it was not on account of her love for her own thoughts. Mr. Northland was totally unknown to her; *he* could say nothing to remind her of the past, or to wound her feelings in the present. Besides which, the interest she had felt in him the first day they met had not been diminished upon a further acquaintance. The Norreyses had now been more than three weeks at the Court, and during that time, although *she had often tried to* draw him into conversation, Rachel had never had a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Northland. She often caught herself thinking about him

when he was absent—mentally following his footsteps when he slipped away from the company up-stairs to his smoking-room or the sober shrubbery paths; caught herself wondering what he mused on whilst he slowly paced them; whether it was an ill-spent life or fortune, a dead love, or a dead heart. His treatment at the Court, his melancholy appearance, his strange solitary habits, all struck Rachel with so much wonder, that often she could not drive the fanciful pictures which she drew of Mr. Northland's past and present out of her head for hours together. Had she been disposed to be more intimate with her hostess she might, perhaps, have told her curiosity upon the subject and had it gratified, but Rachel was too shy of Mrs. Craven, and too modest to wish to appear to pry into the affairs of any one in her house.

She had once ventured, when the name of Cousin Gus was on the tapis, to remark that he appeared very fond of his own company; and her hostess had answered her very determinately,—

"My dear Rachel, he is the *very best* creature in the world; so gentle, so kind, so unselfish, no one could help loving Cousin Gus. You would do so yourself, I am sure, if you only knew him better."

In the mean while the gentleman in question appeared constrained with Rachel, as, indeed, he was with everybody, and seldom accosted her except she commenced the conversation. Therefore, to find him alone upon a garden-bench, without any means of escape, was quite a circumstance to be gloried in. Mr. Northland seemed anything but displeased, either, at the company thus unexpectedly thrust upon him. His soft eyes quite lighted up as Rachel disposed her light figure upon the seat beside him, and he laid his meerschaum down, and assured her that the pleasure of talking to her so far exceeded that of smoking, that if she had no objection he would choose the former. "I smoke more for company than anything else," he said; "a pipe is a friend to a solitary man."

"But why do you remain solitary, Mr. Northland?" asked Rachel, smiling. "It is a very bad compliment to us ladies, I think."

"My dear child," he replied, "what on earth should I do amongst a parcel of gay young people like yourselves? You have your husband, and Cecil is engrossed with Lady Frances, and the widow doesn't suit my taste."

Rachel was wicked enough to make merry at this sally on the part of Cousin Gus.

"Are you afraid she will marry you by force, sir?" she asked, laughingly.

"Well, not exactly," he replied; "but I dare say she would try to do so, as I am an unprotected man. You don't remember me, Rachel, do you?"

She colored at his calling her by her Christian name, and he observed her action.

"My dear child, you are not offended with me, are you? You need not be, for I knew you in long clothes."

"Did you really?" said Rachel, interested in his remark. "I cannot remember you at all, Mr. Northland."

"I dare say not; it's the way with the young; but we old fellows don't forget so easily. And yet there *was* a time, Rachel, and not so very long ago, either, when you used to call me 'Uncle Gus.'"

"Used I? All the memory of my childhood seems to have passed away from me," she answered. "My life, in looking backwards, appears to date only from the day I married Raymond Norreys."

"I dare say; I dare say," he replied. "I knew his father also, Rachel, and his grandfather. He is a fine young fellow! You should be proud of your husband, my dear."

"I am," she said, softly.

"That's right; that's right," replied Cousin Gus, with an energy very unusual to him. "I am a shy man, my dear; very shy! and I'm not much of a hand at saying what I mean, but I do feel very much interested in both Raymond Norreys and yourself;" and Mr. Northland moved nearer to Rachel as he spoke.

"You are very kind," she answered, warmly. She could not edge h

self away from his close proximity, because the bench had arms, and she was at the further extremity of it.

"Very interested indeed," continued Mr. Northland, and his eyes looked what he said. "I don't know any young people in whom I feel so much so. I wish you would let me be your friend, Rachel;" and with this he slipped his arm about her waist.

With all Rachel's own interest in Mr. Northland, in all her concern for his hermit-like qualities, and her compassion for his fancied griefs or wrongs, she had never been quite able to disabuse her mind of the idea that he was just a *little* queer about the head. She gave a twist to her body, to try and escape from the pressure of his encircling arm, and met the gaze of his usually pensive eyes, now roused into something like the expression of a man.

"Dear Rachel!" he exclaimed, as he felt her endeavors to free herself; "dear, *dear* child, don't be angry with me. I *must*, if it is for the first and last time;" and so saying, he pressed his lips upon her cheek and forehead.

Rachel was now thoroughly alarmed and insulted. With a look of indignation, she disengaged herself from his clasp, and without a word, ran down the little path which led into the shrubbery, and with heightened color and fast-beating heart, almost threw herself into the arms of Raymond Norreys, who was quietly pacing up and down there with Mrs. Arundel. For coming in unwarily soon after his wife's departure from the house, the widow had fallen upon poor Raymond, and borne him off to indulge him with a little of the chit-chat with which she was used to entertain Mrs. Craven or Lady Frances, or any one else who was so unfortunate as to fall into her clutches.

"I really don't know where dear Rachel is, Mr. Norreys, but come with me, and we will find her in no time. Let me think; where is she likely to be? With Major Craven? No, no; that would never do, because Lady Frances Morgan is in the dining-room, and we old soldiers know that three is no company. Depend upon it she is somewhere in the garden, and we'll go and find her out, and give her a good scolding."

It was in vain that poor Raymond insisted that he was in no immediate necessity of finding Mrs. Norreys. The widow had him, and he must do her bidding. And so the ill-assorted couple paced the shrubbery paths together.

"How happy dear Rachel seems here," was Mrs. Arundel's first remark, intended to extract a denial from her companion.

"Do you think so?" he replied, falling into the snare. "I have thought she looked pale the last fortnight."

"Ah! well; of course *you* must know best, but I fancied otherwise. She and Major Craven have always been such good friends. I thought they would be so pleased to meet again."

"And yet I had difficulty in persuading Rachel to accept this invitation," remarked Raymond. "She said she didn't want to come."

"No! really? Now *did* dear Rachel say that?" exclaimed Eliza Arundel, her large blue eyes opening wide with her astonishment, feigned or otherwise. "You don't say so? Well, we women are contradictions at our best; and at Gibraltar the two were inseparable. Major Craven is a handsome fellow, is he not?"

"He's well enough," said Raymond, gloomily.

"*Well enough!*" echoed the widow, mimicking him. "Is that all the praise you can find to bestow upon the Adonis of the 3d Royal Bays? I am afraid poor Craven must depend on Rachel for his share of admiration from the Norreys' family; *well enough*, indeed! I wish your wife could hear you!"

"My wife always says she does not like fair men," said poor Raymond; "she maintains that they are insipid."

"The *naughty* little puss!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, laying great emphasis on her adjectives. "And so she tells you that, does she? *I'll* take my lady to task next time I see her, you may depend upon it. And so she really did not appear to like the notion of coming to Craven Court, the *artful little minx*."

Raymond Norreys did not admire hearing his wife spoken of in this style, *d so he plainly* intimated by the frown which gathered on his brow.

"I do not think that Rachel is artful," he replied, curtly; "and there could be no earthly reason for her being so in this case."

Mrs. Arundel changed her tactics immediately.

"Of course not," she said decidedly; and then added, in a more serious tone, as if they really would not joke any more upon the subject, — "The fact is, Mr. Norreys, I dare say dear Rachel felt that the revival of old associations and the memory of old times would be rather more vivid here than at Brompton — as how should it not be? Here am *I*, you see, from whom she has been inseparable, so sadly altered in my circumstances; and, dear Craven, who was always with us, taken up by that pretty piece of pink and white china in-doors; everything changed, in fact. I don't wonder Rachel feels it, poor dear child!"

"Not all changed for the worse for her, I hope," replied Raymond's voice, cheerily, though he felt anything but cheery. "Her father's death, naturally, was a severe blow to her, but——"

"Oh! I wasn't thinking of her father's death at all," said Mrs. Arundel. "He was a very good sort of man, of course; but still, you see, Mr. Norreys, a father——"

"What were you thinking of, then, Mrs. Arundel?"

The question was positively hovering upon the lips of her companion, whose dark cheek had flushed damask under her last insinuation, when Rachel came flying down the little labyrinth as I have described, book in hand, and dashed against her husband's breast. Her face crimson, — herself almost unable to speak from agitation, she looked far more angry than frightened; and the sudden rencounter added to it upset her so completely, that at first she could say nothing; and when she managed to articulate, the words which rose to her lips only served to heighten the idea that her emotion had arisen from some cause of vexation instead of alarm.

"Oh, Raymond!" she exclaimed, "what *are* you two doing here?"

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. Arundel, in a tone that was intended to be very jaunty; "that's a pretty question to put to your friends, Miss Rachel. And pray, what are *you* doing here, if I'm not impertinent in asking?"

Her husband was so taken aback by her sudden appearance, that he had not made up his mind what to say before the widow had concluded her badinage, and so they all three stood and stared at one another.

"I am very foolish," said Rachel, apologetically, and catching her breath as she spoke; "but I was running so fast that you frightened me dreadfully."

"Then, why do you run so fast?" inquired her husband; but she was silent.

"I am going home now," she said, presently, as she left them without further parley, and commenced to walk slowly back to the house.

"Why! I declare!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, as Rachel disappeared, "if the little vixen is not jealous!"

The words shot like a thrill of hope through the breast of Raymond Norreys, and he quite trembled with pleasure as he attempted to laugh them off as a joke, though heartily believing them the while.

"Jealous, — she must be so!" he thought to himself. "That's not a bad card to play. I'll carry it out this evening. Rachel jealous — by heavens! how glad I am!"

And he talked and laughed, and made himself so agreeable, that the widow thought him a more "charming young fellow" than ever. In the mean while, Mr. Northland kept close to his retreat for fear of discovery, and did not even resume the delights of his meerschaum until the sounds of their voices had died away in the surrounding shrubbery, and Rachel retraced her steps to the house.

She was frightened and nervous at the upshot of the little episode which had just taken place in her existence, and felt conscious that her subsequent conduct had been mistaken both by her husband and Mrs. Arundel; but in either case what could she do about it? To whom was she to go with her tale of Mr. Northland's impertinence? — to Mrs. Craven? — to her husband? — to Elise? Oh, no! Rachel could not tell either of them that this man, almost a stranger, had put his arm about her waist and actually kissed her. To *Mrs. Craven it* would be an offence against her guest; with her

husband (notwithstanding his want of love for her), it might create a disturbance; and in Mrs. Arundel's possession, the secret would be public property in half an hour. And would she achieve any good by telling it? The man was certainly not right in his intellect, — there could be no doubt of that. It was easy for her to keep out of his way for the future; added to which, Raymond and she were going back to Brompton the day after the morrow.

And so, taking all these matters into consideration, — although her cheek burned when she thought of the affront which had been offered her, and she sorely wished she had some trustworthy friend to whom she might confide the secret, — Rachel resolved to keep her own counsel

CHAPTER XXII.

SEALED HEARTS.

When Rachel entered her room that evening for the purpose of dressing, she found it already occupied by Mrs. Craven's lady's-maid. The black tulle dress, looped up in every direction by clusters of white roses, which she was to wear, lay spread out upon the bed. Rachel had brought no maid with her to Craven Court, and had been used, whilst there, to wait upon herself; but her surprise at the novelty of the apparition before her was soon quenched by the apparition herself, who intimated "that Mrs. Craven had desired her to ask if she could be of any service to Mrs. Norreys in dressing."

Rachel affirmed that she always did her own hair, and that the housemaid was perfectly competent to lace her dress.

"Scarcely such a dress as this, ma'am, I think," observed the officious lady's-maid.

Since Miss Tagg appeared to wish to do the honors, Rachel made no further objection to her remaining for that purpose.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, have I understood rightly from Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper, that you are in want of a lady's-maid yourself?"

Now the question had been mooted previous to Rachel's leaving the Abbey Lodge. "Yes, I am looking out for one. Why do you ask?"

"Because I have a sister, ma'am, a very accomplished young person, who I think would just suit you."

"If she will call on me in town," replied Rachel, carelessly, "I can speak to her. I suppose you know my address."

Over which indifferent reply Miss Tagg fell into ecstasies, saying she was certain that her sister Mary Ann and Mrs. Norreys would suit each other exactly, and that she should wait upon her as soon as ever she returned to Brompton.

"Mary Ann is living in Eccleston Square now, ma'am, and I will write to her by this very night's post. Good evening, ma'am." And with that Miss Tagg curtsied herself out of the room.

As soon as her own mistress's toilet was completed Miss Tagg found her way to the servants' hall, replete with the news that her sister was about to apply for the situation of lady's-maid to young Mrs. Norreys, and there wasn't no manner of doubt but what she'd get it. But Miss Tagg had better have been more discreet. Several of the servants heard her assertion, and amongst the rest Martha Wilson. This girl had been in a very sulky mood for the last week, — the housekeeper had informed her that she was to have no leave thenceforward, except what she spent at Laburnum Cottage with her mother.

Martha was not like other girls. She knew that it was Mrs. Wilson's doing, not Mrs. Watson's, and her heart felt very indignant at the check put upon her actions, but she had foreseen something of the sort, and calculated against it. She had left the barracks because she would not submit to espionage, and she thought as little about leaving her situation for the same reason; only, the next time she took flight, her mother should

not be the companion of her wanderings. Therefore, as Miss Tagg boasted of Mrs. Norreys's interest in her sister, and her want of a lady's-maid, Martha Wilson had both her ears open, although she took care to keep her mouth shut.

As Rachel, unconscious of the revolution the few words she had uttered before Miss Tagg were creating below, was standing thoughtfully before the pier-glass, surveying the effect of her completed costume, a knock sounded at the door, and Mrs. Craven, also robed in slight mourning, entered the room. In her hand she held a morocco jewel-case; but her first exclamation was in praise of Rachel's appearance.

"My dear child, — forgive me for saying so, — but you look uncommonly pretty! I am almost afraid, if I put a touch more to you, that I may spoil the effect that Tagg has produced; but I did come with the intention of asking you to wear these to-night;" and she placed the morocco case in Rachel's hand as she spoke.

One touch of the spring and the cover flew back, revealing on their dainty bed a magnificent set of carbuncles and diamonds — gems well suited to a dark complexion like that of Rachel. There they lay, looking as if they were never intended to be disturbed, — comb, ear-rings, necklace, brooch, and a pair of bracelets, — Rachel was but a girl after all, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure as she saw the pretty, womanly toys.

"For *me!*" she exclaimed; "really for me!" She had been used to receive a great many presents, but she had never possessed anything so valuable as this before. No one, with all their worship, had ever so endowed her little ladyship before, and the first sight of them charmed her. But the next moment she had pushed them gently away, and made use of the same strange words that had fallen from her lips once before when talking with Cecil Craven.

"Oh, no! Mrs. Craven; don't give them to me. I have no right—indeed I have not!"

The eyes of her hostess dilated with amazement.

"*No right!* dear Rachel. What do you mean? Have *I* not a right to do as I will with them? You have every right, dear child; the best of rights, in your dear father's name. It is a long time since I made you a present, Rachel—Come, let me have the pleasure of putting them on you."

Rachel took the delicate hand, which came so near her face, and kissed it. Her deer-like eyes went upwards to meet the other's glance as she did so, and encountering it all affection, she said, earnestly, —

"Thank you, then, so much. I will take them since you wish it, for your sake and my *father's* sake; not for myself, who have no claim to such indulgence on your part." But Mrs. Craven folded the drooping figure to her breast, and stopped her speech.

"Hush!—hush!" she answered, softly. "My love, you have the highest claims upon me, though you do not know it." She bent forward her graceful head and neck for Mrs. Craven's convenience, whilst the latter hung the delicate ears and throat with the sparkling jewels, fastened them on the glowing breast, and round about the smooth and slender arms.

"We must leave the comb alone for this evening," she said, laughing, as she concluded her task, "for it will not agree with Miss Clark's white roses. Turn yourself to the pier-glass, Rachel, and see what you look like."

A little queen, if stateliness of bearing could make her one. Upon her throat and arms, and in her ears, the brilliant combination of diamonds and carbuncles flashed and glittered till they lighted up the dark skin upon which they lay, and forced it to reflect back their ruby light. And as Rachel contemplated this vision of herself she blushed with pleasure, until her cheeks and eyes rivalled the jewels with which she was adorned.

Mrs. Craven came and stood behind the girl, so that their figures were reflected together in the glass. Seen thus, side by side, and robed in the same manner of costume, the two women did not appear so very unlike one another.

"They are *positively* charming," murmured Rachel, alluding to the other ornaments presented in the mirror.

"And so are you, my dear," returned her hostess. "I am so glad you like them; but I must leave you now, and be on duty in the drawing-room." And Mrs. Craven kissed her, and went away to receive her expected guests.

As she left the room Rachel felt uncommonly happy. In the first pleasure of finding herself the possessor of so unexpected and so valuable a gift, it is true that Rachel Norreys, with all her great capabilities for feeling and remembering her pain, forgot everything but that she did possess it. Mr. Northland's rudeness, about which she had so vexed herself, Eliza Arundel's fading friendship, even her husband's coolness towards her, and her growing love for him, were all forgotten for the moment (only for the moment, mind) as Rachel thought how very nice she looked, and how much she should like Raymond to see her. And so she ran out of her bedroom and tapped at his dressing-room door, and, on being answered, opened it, almost without thinking what she was about, and stood upon the threshold.

"Raymond, what do you think of me?"

The words had scarcely escaped her before she remembered where she was, and what an advance it had been on her part to go there, and she was positively covered with blushing confusion as she awaited her husband's reply. Raymond, who expected to have seen his dress boots, for which he had just rung, thrust into the room, was almost as confused as herself; but she really did look charming, and as he came forward he could not help telling her so, though, as he said the words, he sighed. To hide her confusion, Rachel commenced a rapid account of how Mrs. Craven had given her the ornaments, and wasn't she very kind? and didn't Raymond admire them very much? and must they not be very valuable? and as she ran on thus, her husband mistook her evident embarrassment for a desire to cover some awkwardness about the jewels themselves.

"*Who* gave them you?" he rejoined, sharply. "*Mrs.* Craven, or Major Craven?"

"Mrs. Craven, Raymond," she replied, with wide-opened eyes. "Cecil never gave me anything so valuable as this."

It was not the first time she had called Major Craven by his Christian name before her husband, but he chose to notice it as something out of the common way.

"If *Cecil had*," he replied, with something like a sneer for Raymond Norreys, "I should have just chucked them all back in his face. Curse his impudence!"

Considering that Major Craven, since his own return, had made no offer even of a present to his wife, it was a false move on his part, for Rachel, with a women's quickness, detected at once signs of the feeling he most wished to keep from her knowledge—that he entertained jealousy. For under the influence of Mrs. Arundel's insinuations Raymond Norreys was becoming, little by little, jealous of his wife. All her pleasure in her ornaments seemed gone then, and Rachel descended to the drawing-room with all the old trouble back upon her memory like a cloud, and sitting like a thing of Evil on her spirits. She looked very pretty, and she forced herself to talk and to be agreeable, but all her vivacity was feigned. Lady Frances, in clouds of pink tulle and moss rose-buds, and very sanguine of bringing Major Craven to the point that evening, appeared, both at the dinner-table and afterwards, by far the liveliest and most animated woman of the two. The dessert was not lingered over, and by ten o'clock the music had begun and the dancing-room was pretty well filled. Rachel sat apart at first, declining all offers to dance, and silently watching Major Craven, Lady Frances, and Raymond Norreys, as they moved through the various figures. The latter appeared in the very best of spirits; his bright face and well-set form seemed to have made a great impression upon the young ladies of the party, who smiled most graciously upon him.

"He seems happy enough," thought poor Rachel, as she watched a very warm flirtation he appeared to be carrying on with a faded-looking girl in blue, "and so do Cecil and Lady Frances. Why am I the only one left out?" And in her wounded pride and sense of desolation, her short spell of cheerfulness so soon eclipsed again, Rachel Norreys could have wept as she had seldom wept before.

Major Craven and Lady Frances Morgan had a right to appear happy, for it was at this identical party that Cecil obtained the young lady's leave to ask her noble mamma, the Countess of Riversdale, to bestow her pretty plump hand upon him in matrimony. Little has been said relative to more than the mere outside actions of this pair of lovers, and for a very good reason, that nothing more occurred with them than might be plainly seen by those who watched them. There are some people who have no "inside," and Lady Frances (if not Cecil Craven) was of that number. She was affectionate and modest and harmless; he was affectionate and honorable and easy-going; and beyond this, if more was looked for, the searcher's gain would not repay his trouble. They were not widely different from hundreds of their kind who jostle us at every turn upon the field of life; they played their part at the rate of third and fourth fiddles in the world's great orchestra, and though not thrust prominently forward, still helped to maintain the harmony and well-being of the society they moved in. It would not do for every one to play solos. And although Cecil greatly admired the character of Rachel Norreys, he sometimes viewed the various phases in it with a kind of awe; occasionally he was almost afraid of her, as he had told her once at Gibraltar; and as a wife, the disposition of Frances Morgan suited his own far better. He was ready (however much he liked her), when he thought of Rachel, to exclaim with Byron,—

> "I've seen your stormy seas and stormy women,
> And pity lovers rather more than seamen."

But, however unpleasant they may be at times, it is your stormy women, after all, that can love the best, although they are most dangerous when crossed. Depend upon it, the same energy which, wrongly displayed in one instance, makes our greatest love-poet think it worth while to state his objections to them in his rhyme, will haply bear them through many a tussle in this life, which weaker-minded women would sink under, and keep them faithful to many a love that the falterers amongst their sex would have too much shame, too many scruples, or too great a fear to cling to for better or for worse.

There are scores of Lady Frances Morgans; but it is only here and there, be her faults what they may, that we meet a Rachel Norreys.

However, Lady Frances was the one to engage Major Craven's fancy, or as much of it as was left to be engaged, after having been frittered away in all directions ever since he was sixteen, and he delivered it up to her safe-keeping during a promenade, after the fifth waltz which they had danced together on that night. He was not very agitated over his avowal, nor she on her acceptance of the same. He delivered himself of one or two nervous laughs as he told his tale of love, but, nevertheless, seemed pretty certain of what her answer would be; and Lady Frances blushed a good deal, and said,—"Oh, don't Major Craven," and "I'm certain you can't mean what you say;" and then the formality was over, and she agreed that, subject to her mamma's approval, she would become Lady Frances Craven.

"Only, of course, you will write and ask mamma all about it," was her final stipulation; and Cecil answered, "Of course I shall, by to-morrow's post, —so that's settled. Are you ready?" And encircling her waist again with his arm, whirled her off once more to make the circuit of the ball-room.

When that dance was over, and he had deposited his newly-made *fiancee* on a seat, Cecil Craven felt confused and heated, and almost depressed, as he rushed into the night air to try and cool himself. Was he already sorry for what he had done? Had he made a mistake, and arrived at the knowledge so soon?

Hardly so; and in his case he never came to look upon the step he took that night as a mistake. But there are moments in all our lives when we wish we were better and higher and wiser than we are. Perhaps, even in that first hour of the accepted lover's bliss, Cecil Craven, knowing that Lady Frances was the girl best suited to him as a wife, without a wish for change or a thought of wavering, yet experienced a something like regret that he was not worthier to be mated with something higher and more intellectual than what he felt that he aspired to.

Perhaps he even went so far as mentally to compare his own choice with that dark, thoughtful, "stormy" girl who sat near one of the open windows, pensively gazing out into the night. "But, pshaw!" he said, as he thought of it, "what could I do with a woman like that, if I had her? She'd get sick of me in a week."

In the midst of his cogitations he ran against Mrs. Arundel. Every one was always running against Mrs. Arundel at Craven Court now; but Cecil had scarcely expected to find her at this time walking on the terrace in the dark.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "is that you, Mrs. Arundel? Why are you walking here in the dark? It's damp, too, — there's a heavy dew falling."

"I don't feel it," said the widow, with an air of pensive sadness. "I thought I should like, even though I have no heart to join in such gayety, to walk up here, where I could see the dancing and hear the music. It is a melancholy pleasure, Craven. It reminds me so of olden times."

"Why, poor old Jack never danced, did he?" observed Cecil, who was not always very polite in his way of speaking to Mrs. Arundel.

"Oh, dear no! you know he didn't. I was hardly thinking of him in such a scene. Do you remember the dance the Williamses gave the first year we were at Gib, Cecil?"

He remembered the occasion well enough, as being one on which he had made a great fool of himself with regard to her; but he professed to have forgotten it.

"Upon my word, I don't, Mrs. Arundel."

"Why do you never call me 'Elise' now?" she murmured. "Any other name seems so strange from *your* lips, Cecil."

"When we are in Turkey we must do as the turkeys do," he replied, trying to laugh off her searching question. "It is not the custom in England to call married ladies by their Christian names."

"Ah, well!" she sighed, "perhaps it is best so. But tell me, Craven. that you have not totally forgotten that happy time. You *were* happy, were you not?"

"I always have been so ever since I had the pleasure of your acquaintance, Mrs. Arundel," he replied, laughing.

"Can you laugh when recalling it?" she exclaimed, raising her voice considerably. "Cecil, you are cruel to me. You do it to try my poor wounded heart."

Mrs. Arundel only intended to be highly dramatic; but they were so near the open window of the dancing-room, and the night was so quiet, that her companion was dreadfully afraid that her words should be overheard.

"Good heavens! Elise," he said, "don't talk like that, — some one may hear us. I will see you again soon, — to-morrow or next day, but I must go now," — and vanished into the house as he spoke.

The widow was in the dark, and alone; but a smile of triumph curled her lip. She had really stole out for the pleasure of the walk alone; she had little expected to turn up such a trump-card during her ramble.

"I have made him wince," she said to herself, "deny it if he can. Wait till I can get that little witch, Rachel, and that piece of pink-and-white goodness, Lady Frances, out of the way (and they both go within the week), and I expect I shall do what I choose with their preux-chevalier. What a commotion there will be in the Court when it comes to be known! I imagine his lady-mother will not much fancy having me for a daughter-in-law; but the alternative may be the worse for her. Nous verrons." And so meditating, Mrs. Arundel turned back upon her homeward path.

Cecil, delighted to have rid himself of her company, rushed into the dancing-room again, and walked straight up to Rachel Norreys, who had been sitting still of her own accord all the evening.

"Mrs. Norreys," he said, with his most finished bow, "I request the honor, etc. etc."

"But you can't have the honor nor the et ceteras, Major Craven," she replied, laughing; "because I have refused every one who has asked me to dance this evening."

"*Oh! that's* nothing," he exclaimed; "you can say that I am a privileged person, in the same regiment, and all that sort of thing."

"But Captain Crowe has asked me, and Mr. Fisher and Mr. Weldon" (all of them brother officers of Cecil Craven), "and therefore that would be no excuse at all."

"Then tell the truth," he said, aloud.

"What is that?"

"That I am——" (and the rest he whispered in her ear).

"*Don't*, Cecil," Rachel said, almost angrily; and the brightest of colors mounted even to her forehead. "You are cruel to me."

The very words which some one else had just sounded in his ears outside the opened window. Raymond Norreys, standing near with his partner, heard them also, but was silent.

"Then you will dance with me, Mrs. Norreys," Cecil said, conclusively. From what he drew his evidence was not quite clear, but to Rachel any way it appeared satisfactory.

"Yes, if you really wish it," she said, and rose and joined him.

She waltzed divinely, and she dearly loved the exercise. Cecil Craven was also a good dancer, and they had often and often been partners together when abroad; but his waltzing was clumsy compared to that of Raymond Norreys, whose performance in that way had been pronounced by the belles of the evening to be "perfect." But seeing his wife refuse every offer she received, he had not thought to ask her for a partner. Now, as he watched her, flying round and round in the close embrace of Cecil Craven, he resolved to keep the next waltz open for her. At all events, she would not think a dance too great a boon to give him. With this intention, as soon as the set was over, and Major Craven had placed her, flushed and looking more charming than he had ever seen her yet, upon a seat, Raymond advanced to Rachel, and asked her if she was engaged for the next waltz.

"Oh, no," she replied, thinking he was vexed at her dancing with Cecil after having refused so many others; "for none. Indeed I mustn't dance any more. I ought not to have accepted Major Craven, but I am so fond of it, and it was such a temptation."

"I was going to ask you to dance with me," he said, looking rather disappointed.

Now Cecil had asked Rachel several times before in the evening, and Raymond had not been near her once; and she had felt the omission on his part so much, that she answered him now rather coolly,—

"I will dance with you if you wish it, Raymond, but you must make my excuses if I get into a scrape with any one else about it." And thereupon he put down his name upon her unfilled card.

She anticipated waltzing with her husband, although she had appeared so indifferent upon the matter; but when the time came, and he stood before her waiting to take her on his arm, looking so distinguished and so graceful, Rachel's courage failed.

Raymond Norreys was excited, but not in like measure with herself; he was thinking of the dance. She was thinking of *him*, and him alone, and it was too much for her.

As she felt the encircling of his arm about her figure, clasped one hand in his, and leant the other on his shoulder, Rachel turned sick and giddy; the room and the lights went round and round before her failing vision, and she rather gasped than said,—

"Raymond, Raymond! for God's sake let me go, or I shall faint!"

He placed her on the sofa from which she had arisen to dance with him; he brought her water, whilst officious matrons fanned her into life again; and when the room had ceased whirling, and the music repossessed some meaning in her ears, and she could remember where she was, the revulsion ended in a burst of tears, for which no reason could be extracted from her but the heat and the unusual exercise of dancing, to which of late she had not been accustomed. Mrs. Craven soon hurrying to the spot, believed at once that the scene of gayety had been too much for Rachel in her present state of nervousness, and urged her in a whisper to leave the ballroom. The weary girl was too glad to comply. She hoped that Raymond would follow, and force an explanation from her of her evident emotion.

But Raymond wanted no such explanation, — thought he needed none. He danced no more that night, but wandered out on the dark terraces.

"Hang it," he mentally exclaimed, "she could dance with that pink-and-white fellow there, and appear to like it; but directly she stood up with me, she must needs turn faint, or sham to. I suppose to dance with *me* is too much trouble. But I'll be blessed if I'll stand this sort of thing much longer." By which soliloquy it will be seen that love had blinded the judgment of Mr. Raymond Norreys, as it has done that of many a wiser and a better man before him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MULTUM IN PARVO.

It is often desirable, in the course of a romance, to crowd a vast amount of incident into a small amount of letter-press; for although a great deal may happen in a few weeks of time, if it does not immediately bear upon the subject in hand, its recital in detail is best avoided. Yet links there are connecting each portion of an acted life with it fellow incidents, which must not be entirely lost sight of, even though the tale be but a fancy of the brain.

Two days after the dance and dinner-party, Raymond Norreys and his wife left Craven Court and returned to the Abbey Lodge. During that time Rachel had scarcely seen Mr. Northland, and had certainly not spoken to him. Cousin Gus appeared to be quite aware of the impropriety he had been guilty of, and studiously kept out of her way, even when the carriage was at the door to take them back to the railway station, and farewells were being liberally dispensed and warmly re-echoed. For when the actual moment for parting arrived, Rachel, although she had suffered so much in secret during her visit to the Court, felt sorry to leave it, and clung about the neck of Mrs. Arundel with almost the same degree of fervor with which she used to embrace that lady in the days of yore.

But still she was really glad to return to the Abbey Lodge. When she arrived at its sombre iron gates, and, above all, when she caught sight of the bright, glowing face of Christine as she ran to meet them, Rachel felt, for the first time, that the Abbey Lodge was *home* to her, and its inmates were her mother and her sister. And as she rushed into the hall, and received their united welcome, she said so without hesitation.

"Oh! I am so glad to see you both again," was her warm exclamation; "I am so glad to get home!"

The face of old Mrs. Norreys lighted up with a greater gleam of pleasure at the words than had ever been seen there as the result of any intercourse with her daughter-in-law before. She glanced round for Raymond, that her looks might signify her approbation to him also, but he was busy with the luggage, and had not heard his wife's remark. As for the two girls, they were almost as pleased to meet as if they had been really sisters.

"How have you enjoyed your visit, dear?" was naturally Christine's first question; and "Not very much, Christine; I was not half so happy there as I am here," was Rachel's ready answer, hailed with increased delight on the part of Mrs. Norreys and her daughter, if the shower of telegraphic glances which passed between them and spoke their mutual pleasure might be accepted as a sign. Yes! these two women loved her well. Rachel felt the truth of this as soon as she found time to think about it; and felt also, that notwithstanding all the fidgety rules and regulations, and the monotony of the days at the Abbey Lodge, that she could live there, be happy, and love them in return for Raymond's sake and the regard they bore him.

No thought of self entered into her calculations then. Has it not been said that hers was a character which, once loving, would love *well*?

"*Rachel, will* you come in here for a minute? I want to speak to you."

It was a few days after their return to Brompton, and the voice was that of her husband, and issued from his dressing-room door. Rachel stopped short in her transit to the sitting-room, and complied with his request. She colored with conscious pain as she entered the little apartment and saw the sofa where he laid himself down each night in discomfort to sleep, and the general disorder of the room, usual enough in a bachelor's chamber, but which should never be seen in that of a man who has a wife to keep things tidy for him. But Raymond's thoughts did not appear to be running in the same direction as her own, for he never glanced towards the interior of the room, nor seemed by word or look to wish to convey even a tacit reproach for her being so great a stranger there. Since he had returned from Craven Court he had not been out so much in the evenings; but his silence when amongst them at home was so unlike his general behavior, that it seemed sometimes, not only to Rachel, but to his mother and sister, that his absence would have been a greater relief. He was sitting on the sofa as his wife entered his room, and she went towards him with the evident intention of taking a seat by his side. She often tried now to break the ice between them by some such little graceful act of advancement, but something always seemed to intervene to frustrate her good endeavors. Now, as she approached the sofa, Raymond rose from it, as if to make room for her beside him; but instead of reseating himself, he took a chair, which removed him to the other side of the table. Rachel's eyes sought his with a tender reproach in them, the meaning of which (had he taken the trouble to meet their gaze) he would have found no difficulty in reading; but he never glanced towards her, except in an evasive manner — never, certainly, so as to meet her imploring eyes. He was the first to speak.

"Rachel, would you rather remain here, or go into a house of our own?" He had taken her so much by surprise, that at first she hardly knew what to answer him. "Of course, I don't mean a *house* exactly, because I cannot afford just now to take a whole house and furnish it, — it would be folly in me, not knowing our plans for the future, — but into furnished apartments. Would you not rather have rooms to yourself than live here with my mother and sister?"

He thought that alone with Rachel, in a dwelling of their own, he would have perhaps, a greater chance of winning her affections — of reading her real heart. But she imagined that Mrs. Norreys had intimated to Raymond that they had stayed long enough at the Abbey Lodge, and had expressed a wish for their removal, and so she answered, —

"Does your mother wish us to go, Raymond — is that it?"

"My mother? — no, nonsense!" he returned, pettishly; "she would be only too happy to keep us till doomsday, if we would stay; I was thinking of your comfort, Rachel!"

"Oh, no, thank you, then!" she rejoined, hastily. "I am very comfortable here; I would rather stay, please Raymond — indeed I would!"

The idea of leaving the Abbey Lodge, when they had just begun to love her, scared Rachel; besides, she thought her husband would prefer her choosing to remain with his relations whom he professed so much to love and honor.

"Oh! I'm glad to hear you are so comfortable!" he replied, almost sarcastically. "I believe your bedroom *is* very comfortable, isn't it? — almost as jolly as this crib, which some might call inconveniently small; — however, I dare say I shall be in a smaller one still before long."

"What do you mean, Raymond?" demanded his wife.

"At sea, my dear," he rejoined, carelessly. "Four such cabins as they give me would go into this room."

"Raymond!" she exclaimed earnestly, "you are joking, are you not?"

"Joking!" he echoed; "why should you suppose that I am joking, Rachel? I have no intention of idiing my whole life away on shore, you know; and between you and I, from any enjoyment that I've derived from my holiday yet, I think I might just as well be afloat again, and earning a little money; and I could get appointed to a ship for the asking, for we lieutenants are in a little more request at sea than we are on shore, Miss Rachel?"

His tone was so light and careless, that, as she heard it, she turned co

"And *me!*" she gasped. The words really left her lips, but so indistinctly that Raymond did not catch them; but a slight sound which escaped her made him turn his eyes in her direction. He had just commenced to say,—

"Well, I suppose we must consider the plan of separate houses quashed then," when he stopped short on catching sight of Rachel's figure. She had risen from the sofa, and was standing, leaning one hand upon the table, her face deadly pale, and her whole form trembling. Her husband tried to continue his sentence, but could not finish it in the same strain that he had commenced. "Well, never mind, Rachel," he said "we can talk of it another time—or not at all, if you like it better."

Still he lingered, although he had moved towards the door with the evident intention of leaving the room; there was something in that pallid face and drooping figure which smote him terribly;—perhaps she had something to tell him.

"Rachel," he said, "have you anything you wish to say?"

She shook her head sadly. She could not, for the moment, speak; and men too often mistake such tongue-paralyzing nervousness on the part of women (not knowing it themselves) for obstinacy and self-will. Raymond did.

"If she has anything to say," he thought, "she shall say it; I am not going to coax it from her word by word." And then he added, aloud, "All right, then; there is no need to worry yourself about it," and left her as he spoke. She groped her way into her bedroom, and tried to sit down quietly and think (she could not cry) what life would be to her without her husband. This was the greatest grief that Rachel had yet known—too great a one to cry over; all she could do with it was to sit and think, think, think, until her eyeballs felt hard and burning, and pained her when she closed the lids;—and her head was confused and dizzy, whether she looked back or forwards.

"If you please, mem, there's a young woman for the place of lady's-maid waiting to speak with you."

"Where is she?" demanded Rachel, unclosing her door. There had been several candidates for the situation since her return home, Miss Tagg's sister amongst the number, but none had pleased the quick imperious fancy of Rachel Norreys.

"In the dining-room, if you please, ma'am."

"Very well; I shall be down directly;" and in a few seconds she wearily descended.

The face of the girl, who rose upon her entrance, struck Rachel at once as an engaging and honest one. There was character, too, in the scrutinizing glance which she directed towards her would-be mistress, as much as in the return look which Rachel bestowed upon her. It was Martha Wilson, as may be supposed, but how she managed to get there has yet to be told. From the day that she had been ordered to confine her holiday-making to the company of her mother she had resolved to leave Craven Court; and from the day that she had heard Miss Tagg boast of the interest which Mrs. Norreys took in her sister, and divulge all she knew relative to that lady, Martha had determined that her second attempt at service should be made, if possible, in hers. She was young and inexperienced, and not living in her own house, she would not be so hard as to try and prevent a poor girl from ever enjoying herself. Having come to this resolution, Martha's task was easy. She had only, during the visits she so dutifully paid thenceforward to Laburnum Cottage, to worm out from her mother all that she wished to know concerning Mrs. Raymond Norreys. This was not difficult, for Caroline Wilson was always ready to handle poor Rachel's name greatly to her disadvantage, and the dislike which her mother bore to her was no secret to Martha. But she was sharp enough to have discovered that her mother's dislikes need not be of necessity her own. She had studiously kept out of Rachel's way whilst she was at the Court, for she was particularly anxious that, when she presented herself for service in Brompton, Mrs. Raymond Norreys should not be aware whence she came. This was the easier, since she had in her possession a written testimonial of her capabilities for dressmaking, from the milliner with whom she had served her apprenticeship

(usually given to each girl who had fulfilled her time with credit), and it was so usual a thing for milliners' girls to go out as ladies'-maids, that no one would think the occurrence a strange one. The only thing to be effected was the escape from Craven Court, and this was nothing to a London-bred girl like Martha Wilson. She sacrificed a few weeks' wages, that was all; and all was nothing in her eyes compared with the bliss of being within daily hail of the man she cared for. So, one morning long before it was light, Martha Wilson was up, and on her way to Weybridge station, where she had already despatched her box by the aid of a friendly laborer, and by the time that the servants' breakfast was ready in the hall she was in the train for London, where she presented herself the same afternoon for the inspection of Mrs. Raymond Norreys.

Her answers to the questions put to her respecting where she had lived, and with whom, were all perfectly satisfactory, as far as could be seen by the lady to whom they were addressed. She had served a seven years' apprenticeship with Miss Kennoway, of Oxford Street, whose written recommendation she presented for inspection. Since then she had been staying in the country with her parents, and had come up to London again expressly to get a situation as lady's-maid, for which she was quite competent, except in the matter of dressing hair, in which art she was willing to take lessons. But Rachel always dressed her own hair, therefore the girl's ignorance in this respect was no drawback in her eyes. Furthermore, she gave her name as Martha Green (and had cunningly contrived to insert the assumed one in her character), and wages were no object compared with a comfortable home. Rachel did not hesitate long. She liked the appearance of Martha's fresh-colored face, her intelligent expression, and dark animated eyes, and she resolved from the first to take her into her service. However, to please Mrs. Norreys, who was not so charmed with the girl's looks, she left the matter open until she had visited Miss Kennoway's establishment in person, and learnt what that individual had to say concerning Martha. The only circumstance which leaked out during this interview was that the name Martha had given to Rachel as her own was a feigned one. "Martha Green — Green," said Miss Kennoway, knitting her eyebrows, and trying to collect her mental forces, as Rachel spoke of the girl under that appellation.

"No, ma'am; I have had no girl of that name in my establishment lately. *Mary* Green, perhaps."

"No; Martha Green," persisted Rachel; "at least, I am almost sure of it; perhaps I mistook the writing; it may have been Mary."

"But Mary Green is still with me, ma'am; her time is not up till Christmas, and she has no testimonial of efficiency from our house. Now if it had been Martha *Wilson*, a young woman with dark hair and eyes, I could understand it. She left me between two and three months ago."

"The girl I speak of certainly answers to your description," returned Rachel; "but I am sure the surname's Green."

"Then I am afraid, ma'am, some one has imposed upon you with a false certificate." And Miss Kennoway being very busy, and evidently anxious to take her departure, the latter left her in peace. But she did not relate at the Abbey Lodge all that she had learnt. Martha was to return that evening and hear her decision, and Rachel had taken such a fancy to her that she wanted to speak to her alone upon the subject first. So she only repeated what was the truth, that Miss Kennoway had given the girl an excellent character for honesty and good work, and that was all she could be expected to know about her. But when the evening arrived, and with it Martha, Rachel propounded at once to her the question.

"Martha, I am afraid you have given me a false name; how is that? I have been to Miss Kennoway to-day, and she says if that certificate is yours, that your name is Wilson and not Green." Then Martha grew the color of a peony, and stammering, said, — Indeed, *indeed* she had had no wish to deceive Mrs. Norreys, but Wilson was not her name, no more than Green. She had no name. She was a love-child; it was hard to say so, but she hoped the lady would think no worse of her for it. That was her reason. She was unhappy at home, and wanted to go out to service, but it was the truth, indeed. The lady did not appear as if she would be hard.

seemed wonderfully moved, in consideration of such a little and a common thing as "no name" claimed amongst the poor. She rose up from her seat, and drew nearer to the confused and shame-stricken girl.

"No name," she murmured softly. "No name! Poor girl; why should I think the worse of you for that, if you yourself are honest? I could only pity you, — oh, so very, *very* deeply, — for knowing yourself the subject of so dreadful a misfortune."

The name of Wilson conveyed no light to Rachel; why should it? there were thousands of that name all over England. She only disliked the sound because it reminded her of Caroline.

"I am very glad you told me, Martha. I will keep your secret, even from my friends, and would rather call you by the name of Green than that of Wilson; so let me know you so henceforward. No name! no father! Poor unhappy girl!"

She seemed to be speaking more to herself than to the girl before her. Martha Green had recovered her composure by this time, and thanked her mistress.

"I will serve you faithfully, ma'am, indeed I will, if you will try me, for I believe you are the first lady as ever I've met who would not think harm of me from what I've told you."

"I am not the one to do it," replied Rachel, sadly; "the circumstances you mention could only make me feel for you more. I will engage you, Martha, as my servant, and I trust you to serve me well."

The new lady's-maid was installed in office the day after, and for awhile, all went well with her. She did her duty, and Rachel demanded nothing more. She had several times asked for leave to "step out for a minute" in the evenings, and her mistress had readily granted it. She was inexperienced in the ways of servants; she saw no harm in a young girl threading the streets of London by night, and she thought it very natural that Martha should occasionally like a little pleasure. But the day came when her mother-in law said to her, —

"My dear Rachel, do you not think that your maid has a great deal of liberty? She appears to me to be out almost every night; do you think it prudent to allow it, so young as she is?"

And Rachel answered, carelessly at first, that Martha was always in when she required her services, and she thought servants were all the better for a little relaxation. But Mrs. Norreys having been reared with different ideas, and carrying them out, found by-and-by that her own maid was getting profoundly discontented with the scarcity of leave which she obtained in comparison with the new-comer, and brought many grievous tales against Martha to her mistress. Consequently, the next thing which Rachel heard was that her maid not only had letters brought to her by private messengers, but that she was often out of the house when she had given her mistress no intimation of the fact; and that she had been seen, on more occasions than one, walking and talking with a man outside the Abbey Lodge, and sometimes late at night.

"And I am sorry to trouble you again, my dear Rachel," Mrs. Norreys wound up with, "but really it is a circumstance that you must speak to Martha about. Such a thing has never been allowed in the Lodge, and we shall have all the other servants discontented, added to which, my dear, it is not safe, especially in a great city like London. We know very little about the girl, and the next thing will be that she will bring the man into the house, and we may be robbed before we know where we are!"

Rachel had no alternative but to speak to Martha about what she had heard. Her accusation, notwithstanding its truth, took the girl wonderfully aback. She had not been aware that her meetings with Mr. Tom White outside the Abbey Lodge gates had been either seen or noticed. She had just begun to settle down comfortably in her place, and to feel attached to her young mistress, and now the awful words, — "I could not allow such a thing in the house, Martha; if you persist in such an acquaintance I am afraid we shall have to part," struck her like a knell.

For this she had been turned out of the barracks, thrust from beneath the roof of her legal and natural protectors; for this she had thrown up her situation at Craven Court, and left her mother without a line to trace

her whereabouts; for this she supposed she should have to leave this place also, where she was so comfortable, and thought it probable she should remain so long. Would it not be the same wherever she went? would not her fatal attachment to this great Unknown pursue her, and be condemned by all who became aware of its existence? The idea was too much for poor Martha. She had been impudent to her mother's husband and defiant to her mother herself; but Rachel's kindness, and the sense of desolation which was creeping over her, broke her down entirely. Her head drooped lower and lower as her mistress expressed her disapprobation of her conduct, and before she had concluded Martha's face was in her hands, and she had sunk down, sobbing with all her might.

Her distress touched Rachel, and Martha's grief, like her nature, was very violent and stormy. She drew near the girl, and laid her own small hand upon the other's palm, and spoke kind words, trying to soothe the tempest of her grief. Little by little she drew from her the whole story of her love; of how she had met the man who called himself Tom White, of the words he had used, the promises he had made, and the presents he had given. Rachel was young in years, but not in heart; her quick comprehension told her in a moment with how much danger such an intimacy as her maid described must be fraught to a girl in her station of life if — as Martha affirmed — her lover was a gentleman. She tried to place the circumstances and probability of their issue in a plain, every-day light before the eyes of the uneducated woman; attempted to make her answer to herself the question, to what end a gentleman could pay attention to a milliner's apprentice; and to make her comprehend, by her own reasoning rather than by what her mistress said to her, that if he really loved her — as he said he did — he would speak his mind out like an honest man, or leave her to herself and safety. She drew a mental picture of Martha in those splendid rooms of his that she described as having seen, and placing it before her, without a single dash of spurious coloring to make it brighter, bade her ask herself what she could do there? how she would look and act if even she were asked to go, which yet was more than doubtful? There was but one way in which a gentleman would take her to his home, and when Rachel spoke gently on this subject — not to wound the other's coarser feelings — her own voice would falter and become low, and Martha's cheeks, which were honest, she thanked Heaven, yet, would redden as much as any lady's when shame is talked of.

These conversations did not all happen in one day; nor was it even in one confidential hour that Rachel drew from Martha the story of her love. But little by little it oozed out from the woman's over-laden breast, at first in her own defence, then as a relief — and lastly, with an agonized cry for help, as the probable issue of her attachment was set before her in its proper light. This is the part of my story, which, if detailed and canvassed thoroughly, might almost fill another volume, but which, though leading to a circumstance of importance, and therefore necessary to be touched upon, is of itself so apart from the fortunes of my hero and heroine, that to do more than skim it lightly would be to exceed the duty of their biographer. But having learned the history of her lady's-maid, Rachel's next concern was to lead Martha to act in the future as might be best for herself. She could not ask her to give up at once this man's acquaintance (no true woman would have done it, being asked without a better proof of his unworthiness than mere assurance), but her object was thenceforward to try and find out, and make the girl herself attempt the same, what was his mind towards her. And busied with such thoughts and full of trouble for herself, Rachel found the autumn drag on drearily. Sometimes she felt it almost too heavy for endurance, and nightly she cried to heaven to send a way or means by which her path might be made straight before her.

At this time she was greatly given to sitting writing by herself; sometimes little histories of her own heart to give to Raymond, by which it might be made quite clear to him why she had not cherished the same love to greet him with which she had promised so to keep when they had parted; sometimes long letters to ask him to be merciful, to tell him that she bore a heavy secret at her heart, which was wearing her life away

and clouding all her happiness, and that she longed for his sympathy in her discomfort and his guidance, even though she must not tell it him; sometimes she poured out passionate effusions that she loved, *loved* him—and should die unless he let her tell him so, and echoed back the assurance to her fainting heart. And these last she would generally write in the dusk, or late at night, and, reading the next morning, would blush over them and cry, as she felt that no written words could ever say how much she cared for him; and if they could, that she should never have the courage to send them on their mission. One night she even went so far as to lay a tiny note upon his desk when she retired to rest,—only a few paltry words, to say that she was sorry, oh! so sorry, Raymond, for the past, and that—that she was his affectionate wife,

RACHEL NORREYS.

But taken with a sudden fright lest he should never read them, or reading, feel indifferent or angry, crept in again softly in her night-gown, and abstracted the note before he could return to claim it, and took it back with her to bed, and laying it under her pillow, wept herself to sleep.

How foolish! some will exclaim perhaps—how weak! how worse than childish! only one word required to make them both happy, and such a fuss made about saying it!

Yes; only one word, and a very common one; but still a word, fair lady, which under the same circumstances you might have found it very difficult even for your courageous self to utter; for this barrier had been raised between the husband and the wife,—not by *her*, but *him*,—it was Raymond who had said he would not claim her ever, and had left the proud, sensitive heart henceforward to do its own wooing.

And Rachel's pride had rebelled at his late treatment of her, and it had made the task before her still more difficult than it had been before; but with all her anxiety and suspense she never thought of making a confidant in this except, in Heaven's good time, the only one who had the right to know it. Else, had she been so disposed, Christine would have been very happy to share her troubles with her, and suggest impossible remedies; but poor Christine had her own little cloud looming in the distance. Her spirits had not been so bright since Rachel's return to Craven Court, and that the latter soon discovered; but her sister-in-law (beyond allowing that something connected with Mr. Alexander Macpherson had certainly vexed her) would not plead guilty to the charge. The fact is, she had no tangible source of trouble; it was only dawning upon her, that notwithstanding her prospects in life were supposed to be settled, there was an unsatisfied want ever making itself known when she thought of the future before her. A fearful "only," though, for a woman to combat with; and sweet, loving Christine Norreys deserved a better fate than to be left to grapple with it alone. But at present it was too much a shadow and an unreality to be spoken of, except to her own heart.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A WOMAN SCORNED.

Craven Court was unusually empty. Mr. Northland had gone into Berkshire on a visit to some friends; and Lady Frances Morgan had returned to the protection of her mother, the Countess of Riversdale. The fact that Major Craven had made her daughter an offer having been duly communicated to that lady, and most graciously responded to, Cecil's heart was, of course, most properly set at rest upon the matter, and his mother's thrown into a perfect palpitation of delight at the successful issue of her matrimonial scheme for the advancement in life of her son. But the Countess thought it advisable that Lady Frances should return to the maternal *wing at once*, where she would be happy also to shelter Major Craven if *he would follow* his fiancee, as soon as was agreeable to himself, and

make a short stay at Egham Priory. Cecil accepted the limited invitation more for appearance sake than anything else, and intended starting for Egham Priory in the course of a few days.

In the mean while he and his mother were left to the enjoyment of each other's company. In a few lines, Cecil had made known to Rachel Norreys the issue of his proposal to Lady Frances Morgan, begging her, at the same time, to keep the matter a secret for the present, which, whilst heartily congratulating him on his success, she had readily promised to do; and this embargo Cecil also laid upon his mother. Mrs. Craven was all eagerness to transmit it to every one she came across; but on this point her son was resolute. He had the scruples of a man in such things, and did not relish his private affairs being made the subject of public comment, even before they could be said to be finally settled.

"When the wedding-day is fixed there will be plenty of time for gossiping," he said, in answer to his mother's arguments in favor of placing the announcement amongst the fashionable on-dits of the "Morning Post."

"Not even to Mrs. Arundel, Cecil?" she complained; "may I not tell such an old friend of yours as that? It will give her such pleasure to hear it."

Cecil was doubtful of the exact amount of pleasure that the widow would derive from the intelligence, but would allow of no exception to the strictness of his orders, even in her favor.

"Certainly not," was his undisguised reply. "I would rather any one knew it but that 'sad rattle,' as she calls herself, Eliza Arundel."

"Well, Cecil, I must say that I think you behave very badly to the widow of your old friend," rejoined Mrs. Craven, reproachfully. "I am sure Mrs. Arundel is a most charming and amiable person, always ready to do a kindness, or to make herself useful; and your constant refusals to go and see her oblige me at times to feel very awkward. I declare, you have not been once in the cottage since she settled there! Do call upon her, my dear, before you go to Egham Priory."

"What will be the good of it?" he argued; "she is here every day; I see her often enough, Heaven knows."

"Politeness requires it, my dear Cecil. It is only for the form of the thing."

"If it's only for the form of the thing I can leave a card there, or send it by post."

"My dear!" exclaimed his mother, "you are really very ungrateful. Have you forgotten all the kindness she has shown you in times gone by?"

"Well, what on earth do you want me to do, then?" he said at last, tired of arguing the point.

"Only go and call upon her, dear, and say you are sorry you have not been before, and anything else that is polite."

And so, taking a great deal of credit to himself for his filial obedience, Cecil Craven announced his intention the next morning of putting his mother's wishes into execution; and as after luncheon (at which meal, for a wonder, the widow had not been present), he was about to stroll over to Laburnum Cottage, his mother met him in the hall, with a large bouquet of hot-house flowers.

"Take these to dear Mrs. Arundel, with my love," she said; "and tell her I hope we shall see her at dinner this evening."

Cecil looked at the flowers in dismay.

"Why couldn't you have sent them over with a note?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, you lazy boy, you fine gentleman!" was his mother's rejoinder. "Do you really mean to say that you would be ashamed to be caught carrying a bouquet of flowers to a lady?"

"No, not *ashamed*," he answered; "but—well, never mind, give them to me, mother, though I shall not deliver your message, because she's sure to come to dinner without it."

Mrs. Craven laughed; and called him more names, and then he stepped into the Court grounds, flowers in hand, and took his way to Laburnum Cottage.

The widow had not been without hope that she might see him that after

noon, although she could hardly be said to have expected him. But this was the first time that Major Craven had visited the Court on leave since Lady Frances had returned to Egham Priory, and Eliza Arundel had not forgotten the little interview which had taken place between them on the terrace the night of the dancing-party, and had taken to lingering in her own drawing-room until the first dinner-bell rang at Craven Court, on the chance of Cecil redeeming the promise he had made that evening that she should see him soon,

She was heartily glad to think that, for some time at least, her intercourse with him during his visits home would be uninterrupted; for it was unlikely that either Rachel or Lady Frances would return to the Court at any rate before Christmas, and judging from the specimen of her power to move him that Cecil had given her when she accosted him on the terrace, what might she not do if she played her cards well in the course of two whole months almost spent in his company. But not under his mother's roof; what she effected must be within the limits of her own home.

The departure of Martha from the Court had excited no small surprise both there and at the Cottage, for she had now left her place for some weeks. Caroline Wilson had not gone distracted, it was not in her nature to do so; but on making the natural inquiries amongst Mrs. Craven's servants, that a mother under such circumstances would do, and receiving some rather illiberal remarks from the housekeeper on her daughter's conduct, she had abused and insulted that respectable personage to such a degree that Mrs. Watson had forgotten all about her respectability, and showed that she possessed a "rough side to her tongue," as well as Mrs. Wilson, and the two did not again part until they had established between them an everlasting and bitter hatred. Then Caroline had gone to the Aldershot Barracks, looking everywhere for her daughter, and subsequently to Miss Kennoway's, in Oxford Street, who deposed to having been asked by a lady for a character for one of her apprentices lately, but it wasn't Martha Wilson.

"And if it had been I should have been none the better able to inform you where she is," concluded Miss Kennoway, "for the young lady was in here and out again in a quarter of an hour, and left neither name nor address."

And so poor Mrs. Wilson had returned home to Mrs. Arundel none the wiser for her search; and although she gave it as her steadfast opinion that "Martha would turn up, married or single, before long, and 'twasn't a bit of use fretting after her, or looking for her," she *did* fret about her daughter's flight, and became more sour and vindictive-looking than she ever had before. Mrs. Arundel was more than ordinarily pleased on the afternoon alluded to, to hear the wicket-gate slam, and, looking up, to see Cecil Craven actually entering alone, bearing a large bunch of flowers in his hand. It looked well now, it really did; and the widow settled herself with a becoming expression of languor and wearied expectation on the reclining couch which filled up one half of the tiny room, so that when Cecil entered, and took a chair near her, it was pretty well filled altogether. The widow was most becomingly attired for conquest — indeed, with the exception of the cap, no costume could have suited her better than her weeds, since the intense black contrasted well with her fair skin and hair, and took off from the growing *embonpoint* of her figure. And this afternoon, either by accident or design, she had on no cap at all; but her flaxen ringlets were disposed about her face as in days of yore, and caught up negligently into a silken net behind. Cecil really thought, when he first turned his eyes upon the widow, that he had not seen her look so well for ages as she did upon that afternoon.

"My dear Craven," she ejaculated, as he greeted her, "what charming flowers, and what a pleasure and surprise to see you here. It is the first time (is it not?) that you have honored my tiny domains."

Upon this searching address, Major Craven found himself positively stammering, as he gave the flowers and his mother's message (which slipped out of his mouth in his confusion, although he had really intended not to deliver it), and said he believed Mrs. Arundel was right, but that his frequent absence from home, and his onerous duties whilst there, as only son, etc., must plead his excuse for the apparent neglect.

"Ah, now, hold your tongue, you naughty boy!" exclaimed the widow, playfully, as she shook her curls at him, "and don't make any more false excuses, because it's no use; we know all about it. When the Court is full of young ladies there is no time to be dancing attendance upon old ones, and that's the truth, isn't it?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Arundel, you do me great injustice," ruefully said poor Cecil, who was a bad hand at fighting his own battles when brought face to face with a woman. "If I had not had the pleasure of seeing you so often, I should certainly have found my way over here, if only to ask the reason why, and that you ought to know."

"Ah, well!" sighed the lady, "you are all alike, the whole lot of you! And now that you have come, tell me some news. Have you heard from your lady-love since her departure?"

"What lady-love?" he inquired, evasively.

"Now, don't pretend not to understand me, when you know as well as I do — or have you so many, Craven, that you are doubtful which I allude to?"

"I am really quite in the dark," he replied.

"Well, then, I must enlighten you, I suppose. I meant Lady Frances when I first spoke, but perhaps you were thinking of Rachel Norreys. Ah, Craven, you're a naughty boy!"

If Cecil Craven did not like to hear the name of Lady Frances Morgan connected with his own, still less did it please him to think of Rachel Norreys being spoken of in the same style, and therefore he answered, gravely, —

"A jest is a jest, Mrs. Arundel; but you forget that Rachel Norreys is a married lady. That circumstance should preserve her sacred even from a jest."

But here the remembrance flashed into his mind of how much that argument had weighed with himself when the reputation of the woman before him had trembled in the balance. He felt ashamed and vexed that he should have been betrayed into such an expression of feeling in her presence. Eliza Arundel guessed what he was thinking of, and took advantage of the circumstance.

"Do you really think so, Cecil?" she asked, in a pathetically plaintive voice; "not *always*, I am afraid." He stirred uneasily, and was silent. "I know it *should* be so," she continued, in a low and virtuous tone; "but how few of your sex act up to such a sentiment! And then, when they have injured, perhaps by their thoughtless attention, the character of a woman they professed to love, they leave her to bear alone the brunt of the world's opinion, and the blame. For she is the one who is always blamed the most, even though her heart should have been so concerned in the matter that years of after-neglect fail to wipe out the memory of past happiness from her mind, nor the love in which it resulted, from her soul."

"Now, is it not so, Cecil?" she demanded, presently, of her victim.

"I know it is sometimes, Mrs. Arundel," he replied.

"Why *Mrs. Arundel?*" said the widow, with a mixture of injury and expostulation. "You called me Elise the other night, Cecil; why cannot you continue it? Is it *too much* to ask, after all that has passed between us?"

It was a great deal too much, and Cecil felt it to be so; but with his habitual cowardice for doing what he knew was right, when it resulted in present inconvenience to himself, he yielded to her desire. Besides which, neither Rachel nor Lady Frances were within hearing, and Cecil was but a man.

"Of course not, Elise, — don't mention such a thing," he urged. "I have dropped the habit for the sake of prudence, fearing it might attract notice, — for *your* sake, indeed, rather than my own. But I will call you that, or anything, so that you will be prudent also, and not wound us both unnecessarily by alluding to what is past. We can gain no good by it, Elise; it is best forgotten. I was young then, and very wrong, and have to ask your pardon for leading you, perhaps, into much that was folly," — (if Major Craven had substituted "being led" for "leading," it would have been more *to the purpose*), — "but I know you have forgiven me long

ago, for you have often told me so, and all we have to do now is to forget it and be happy."

"Easier said than done," said the lady, shaking her head, mournfully.

"Nay, Elise," he responded, "you must not say that even if you feel it. It does not go well with this sort of thing;" and he touched her crape-covered dress as he spoke. She twitched it from his grasp, impatiently.

"And who do you imagine I mourn for," she exclaimed, angrily, "if not for you, Cecil? What do you think this black dress reminds me of, if not of your broken promises and vows of love? Oh, Cecil, is it possible that you have forgotten all we once talked of and planned together? Has the remembrance of those blissful days altogether faded from your heart? Does no recollection ever flash over it of the time when you used to say that to call me *yours*, — to feel my smiles, my duty, and my love, — your lawful due, — you would barter all your prospects for this life?"

"I dare say I did, Elise, (I have no doubt I did, since you say so), but those are amongst the things that are best forgotten. We cannot renew those days; let us bury them with even the recollection of the follies we then uttered. I am grieved to find that you have not already done so. You must think less of me, I am afraid, than I hoped you did."

"Less of *you*, Cecil, when I think of them! Why should I? Why is it impossible those days should be renewed?"

He turned quickly round, — he had been gazing out of the window, — and faced her suddenly. "Elise, you would not have them so, even if you could."

"Why not?" she cried. "Do you think that *I* must be changed because you are so; that I am rejoiced to see the link between us broken, because you have long striven to escape from the old fetters? Cecil, you once *swore*, if ever I was free again, that you would be my husband. Do you ever think of that?"

He felt almost frightened at the woman's vehemence, and scarce knew how to answer her. But at last he said, somewhat as he had done before, "You do not mean to say, Elise, that you would be so bound again, even if you could. You do not mean to tell me that I am regarded by you with the same feelings that you held towards me six or seven years ago. It is impossible."

"It is not impossible," she exclaimed, rising from her recumbent position and coming towards him. "Cecil, it would have been impossible for me to have forgotten such as you; and you — I scarcely think you have forgotten, either, though you try to make me believe so. I have spent a weary life for your sake, Cecil; borne a great deal from you in silence, and without reproach; but if you will fulfil your promise now, you will find me ready to forgive and cancel all the past, in consideration of the present. Think of those vanished years, dear Cecil; of my love for you and yours for me, and say we shall be happy from this time forward."

She looked into his eyes as she spoke, and tried to bring back into her own some of the old expression which used to lurk there when she was younger, and fancied that she loved the man who was before her.

But she utterly failed. Love of gain, of triumph, of self were there, and many other loves as ugly, but no true unselfish passion calculated to lure back the heart which had forsaken her.

And this was altogether too much for Cecil Craven. He was a moral coward, truly; but he could not sit still and be offered marriage by a woman whose very name he had learnt to abhor, and whom he had given to understand years ago was to consider all things between them at an end. That there had been passages of love between them, and that he had made many foolish vows of never-dying constancy, he knew, and for that reason had been leniently disposed towards the widow, and anxious to avoid wounding her feelings; but the time was past for even this. He was no longer free to be spoken to in such a strain, and Mrs. Arundel must know it for the future. And so he rose, and standing off a little from her, said, though not without a degree of hesitation, —

"Elise, this is folly; it must end. That we were lovers once, I do not *wish to argue*; but if I professed to care for you still, even in the slightest *degree, I should* profess what is not true. The past is past. Let it be for-

gotten by us both; or if that is impossible, at least buried in silence. Do not let us ever allude to the subject again; and to tell you the truth, one reason why I have kept aloof from you until to-day has been occasioned by the fears that we might be tempted so to do. But it can be productive of no good, and may do infinite harm (to your friendship, for instance, with my mother). So for all our sakes it will be better never spoken of. For my own part, I must refuse to do so again." And then he stood, looking foolish, as a man must under such circumstances, waiting for the woman's answer. It came at last, in a perfect burst of fury. She knew her game was lost, and so no longer feared to run the risk of allowing him to see her hand; but the storm came down on his devoted head like hailstones and coals of fire.

"*You* refuse, indeed! *You* refuse, Major Craven, to speak again upon this subject! What if *I* refuse to hold my tongue upon it? You brought a scandal upon my good name; you were the cause of quarrels between my husband and myself. You have promised, again and again, if the time ever came for it, that you would make me your wife. Suppose I refuse to keep silence upon this. Suppose I choose to tell it all to your mother and your circle of admiring friends. What then, Major Craven; what then?"

"What then?" he answered, contemptuously. "Why they might call me a fool, Mrs. Arundel, and justly, for having been so easily taken in; but I am afraid they would bestow a harsher name than fool upon yourself, for leading a boy of twenty so much the wrong way; and not the first boy, either, that had fallen in your hands; remember that. Had it been so, I might mislead myself with the false notion that what you say is true, that your heart still is mine, and that, in consequence, you hold some claim upon me. But you know that it is false. You know that I was but one of many; and that the name of Arundel was known throughout the regiment as another word for *man-trap* and *deceiver*. You almost make me blush to have to speak so to a woman, but it is more your shame than mine that you have forced the truth from me."

And then he held his head down, and drooped his eyes so as not to meet her own, as an honest man should do when necessity compels him to lower the woman he has once professed to love. And she listened to his speech throughout in silence. She saw that she was impotent in his hands; and when he had concluded, her rage almost prevented her utterance. Her pale face had turned an ashy gray; her lips were livid, and she could hardly find her tongue, but when she did, her next words were,—

"But your reputation is capable of being soiled, Major Craven, without the aid of *my* name being dragged through the dirt. Suppose I choose that course of action?"

"I defy you to do it," he replied. "I defy you to hurt me, my reputation, or my happiness. On the first you have no longer any power; the second is far above *your* reach, unless you soil your own (and you are too much woman in one sense, and not enough woman in another, to do so much for me); and as for the third, it is secure, thank Heaven, and will soon be securer still."

She understood what he meant, and her lips set themselves together and trembled.

"You mean," she said slowly, "that you are engaged to be married to Lady Frances Morgan."

He was too desirous to triumph over her to be prudent; too satisfied with his own success to be modest; too much engrossed in his wish entirely to nonplus and undeceive Mrs. Arundel to remember his wish that she should not know of his engagement, and so he said,—

"I *am*, and shall be married to her very shortly. Perhaps, after this announcement, you will have the kindness to leave me alone." He had taken up his hat, then, and seemed about to go, but pausing on the threshold, apparently had not the heart to leave the woman, shamed through his own words, without a single farewell. And so he said, rather rapidly, "I hope what has passed between us this afternoon will make no difference in your intercourse with my mother, Mrs. Arundel. My lips, you may rest assured, will never open on the subject, so the issue of our conversation rests now *entirely with yourself*. Good morning." And bowing to her, he curtly to

his leave, whilst she remained standing where he had left her, mute from astonishment at his coldness, and disgust at her baffled design.

What she did during the rest of that day is not known, but it is certain that she never appeared at the Court dinner-table, and on Cecil being asked the reason by his mother, he briefly answered that he was not in the lady's confidence; and that if Mrs. Craven was very anxious to learn, she had better send to Laburnum Cottage and inquire. But Mrs. Craven's anxiety did not appear to extend to this degree, and the mother and son passed the evening alone together.

On the next day Major Craven took his departure for Egham Priory.

There is a well-known passage in Congreve's "Mourning Bride," which runs thus, —

> "Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned."

And when I first began to write the history of Mrs. Arundel, I thought it would form an appropriate motto for the passions which her life displayed.

But the more such a a character as hers is analyzed the less can it be justly connected with anything, however wrong, that has in it the elements of power and grandeur and nobility. "Love" (real love) "to Hatred turned," and bearing as its fruit Fury and Rage, is a lamentable exhibition of a soul-degrading passion, but with all its errors it has stamped upon it the word "great."

"A woman scorned" where she has reason (on acconnt of her own constancy) to look for love, is a situation which human nature cannot contemplate without a shuddering horror, nor endure without higher aid than is to be found within the limits of its own strength. What wonder, then, that a devouring mania turned upon itself, wronged without reason, and cruelly shamed before the world, should generate all evil, injury, and revenge, even to bloodshed, and a hurrying of its victim into the arms of an eternal retribution.

But Mrs. Arundel's feeling for Cecil Craven was not love, and that constitutes all the difference. Had she really loved she would have wreaked her vengeance, or parted from him ages before, and not carried a smiling face above her fancied wrongs whenever it suited her convenience so to do. Congreve's "woman scorned" would have spoken out when first the scorn was hers; she would have died beneath the silence and maintained propriety of heaped-up years. Her *heart* it was that had been touched, and lighted up her furious rage; but it was the *vanity* only of Eliza Arundel that had suffered; consequently the *little* feeling led her on to a little and inglorious revenge. No! I abjure that motto for the widow Arundel; henceforward it must stand for some woman with a larger mind, a larger affection, more love for the man who has wronged her, and less for herself. After Major Craven had left her with truths upon his tongue which she should have almost died with shame to listen to, Eliza Arundel felt no pity for him or for herself; no admiration kindling in her breast for his outspokenness whispered that he was right and she was wrong; no wish broke from the heart she said still loved him, that he might be happy — whatever was the fate in store for her!

No! there was no room in the widow's breast for any thoughts like these — for any pity, love, or self-contrition; her whole mind, from the date of his departure, was filled but with one idea — the best method for carrying out a petty and malignant revenge against him for his rejection of her advances. "He shall regret it; he shall be sorry; I will make Major Craven rue this day!" were the sentences which, ringing their changes but with little variation, passed rapidly through her brain as she pondered on the interview which had just taken place between them. She had thought of this — anticipated it — even prepared for it. She had seen it looming in the distance for her, when she was at Gibraltar; had watched it drawing near and nearer almost daily, ever since she had set her foot in England. And now it had arrived, she was more than ready to follow it up with her revenge — a revenge to gratify which she would have sacrificed anybody *or anything* but herself; and, as far as that went, she felt that in the eyes of Cecil Craven she had sacrificed herself already.

For that evening, and many evenings afterwards, she sat in her own room, writing and re-writing long letters, and then destroying them, only to be transcribed afresh upon the following day; holding lengthy private conferences the while with Caroline Wilson, whom she admitted to familiar conversation with herself, more as if she was a friend than a servant; and, of the two, it is doubtful whether the mistress or the maid possessed the higher soul.

But, in the mean while Mrs. Arundel did not neglect to derive every advantage that she could from her footing at the Court. Mrs. Craven was entirely alone, and very anxious that the widow and her little daughter should take up their abode with her until Mr. Northland's return; but to this plan the latter lady could not consent.

"Dear Mrs. Craven, I will come over whenever you wish me to do so; I think nothing of the trouble; but mine is but a tiny household, and requires the eye of its mistress over it continually, lest things should go wrong."

And Mrs. Craven, in consequence, was only the more impressed with the excellency of her friend's domestic qualities, and the love she evinced for her home, and contented herself with pressing her to come to dinner every day, and for a drive every afternoon. And the mornings and evenings Mrs. Arundel devoted to the work she had in hand, which progressed favorably; and after Cecil Craven had again left Egham Priory and returned to his barracks at Aldershot, and Mrs. Craven (not feeling very strong after the summer weather) proposed spending a short time at the sea-side, and asked the widow and little Emily to accompany her there as her guests, Mrs. Arundel unhesitatingly acceded to the offer, with abundant thanks and expressions of gratitude for the kindness which had prompted it.

But before she left Laburnum Cottage under the charge of Caroline Wilson, the work she had set herself was accomplished, and three packets were lying in her private drawers, ready addressed and sealed. Two of them were merely bulky letters, directed to the mistress of Craven Court and the Countess of Riversdale, but the third, which was inscribed to Raymond Norreys, appeared to contain some inclosure; and all three addresses were written in a feigned hand, and rather a remarkable one.

"Mind, Caroline," was Mrs. Arundel's last words to her faithful servitor, "that you post those letters *in London* about a week hence, not earlier, and register the one for Mr. Norreys. Mrs. Craven's will be sent on to the Court, and forwarded from there to whatever address she may order her letters to be sent. But on no account let either of them out of your own hands, and post them yourself. Now, *mind!* I depend upon you!"

"You may depend upon my doing as you say, ma'am," was the reply of Mrs. Wilson; "and I hope, if any harm comes of it (particularly with regard to Major Craven's stud, which Wilson knows of) that you will make it good to me with regard to him. For, though I sha'n't be sorry to see Mrs. Norreys get into a scrape, I don't bear so much love to this one, either, as all that comes to, when every offence of mine is likely to be visited by Wilson on the head of my girl. Oh! my dear girl, I wonder where she can be?—I'd cut off my right hand to do the creature a service as would bring her back safely to me again!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE SUSPICION.

"Is that your maid's lover, Rachel, sneaking about outside the garden wall now?" inquired Raymond Norreys, returning suddenly to the house one evening just as he had quitted it, and addressing his wife,—"a fellow in a drab-colored great-coat with a black velvet collar; because, if it is, I think I know him."

Rachel, in her wish to benefit Martha, by having some conclusive proof to put before her that the man who wrote, and walked, and made love to

her, was not a proper acquaintance to pursue, had enlisted her husband in the cause, and asked him to try and find out what it was impossible she could do herself, who the man calling himself Tom White was, and what was his character and occupation; and, although Raymond had pooh-poohed the idea as Quixotic, and asked Rachel why she could not dismiss the woman at once, and have done with her, he had, nevertheless, kept his eyes open when he left and returned to the Abbey Lodge at night, on the chance of catching sight of the figure which was said to haunt its environs so often.

"I am sure I cannot tell," replied Rachel, speaking in a low voice, for this little business had been a secret between the husband and wife, and had drawn them closer together in familiar intercourse than anything had done yet; "I have never seen the man, you know, Raymond, but I can ask Martha. Describe him to me."

"A tall fellow, rather fair, with a reddish face, and dressed as I said before. If it is the man I mean, he has a scar on his forehead, across the eyebrow, where the hair has never grown. I do not know him by name, though I meet him nearly every night at some place or other, and I am almost certain the person I met just now was he, and that he recognized me, for he shrunk away into the shadow as I passed him, and pulled his hat over his eyes. If I am right, Rachel, tell your maid from me to give him up, or leave the house, for he is a man no virtuous woman, high or low, should speak to."

"I will ask Martha directly," said Rachel, quite excited at her husband's news; "but it is no use your waiting, Raymond, if the man is gone."

"Nor if he were still there," rejoined her husband; "for it is no affair of mine, — our business lies with her, and not him. However, I will tell you more about him to-morrow;" and he left the house again as he spoke.

When Rachel summoned her maid that evening, and asked her, hurriedly, if the description that her master had given tallied with that of her acquaintance, mingling, as she put her series of questions, great-coats and red complexions, black velvet collars and fair hair, in one breath, — and winding up with the unanswerable fact that the gentleman in question had a remarkable scar over his eyebrow, poor Martha could not bear up against such a weight of evidence, and immediately confessed that she thought the person mentioned must be Mr. Tom White, particularly as she had parted with him beneath the garden wall at the identical moment that she heard her master's step coming towards the iron gate.

"Then if that is the case, Martha, Mr. Norreys says that you must either give up his acquaintance or leave my service, for he is not a fit person for you to know; but I should be very sorry to lose you, Martha."

Of course Martha curtsied and cried, and said she was willing to do anything that was right and just, but that she could not help hoping that her master had made a mistake about the individuality of the man in question.

But when Raymond saw his wife on the next morning, he told her that he had made no such thing; that, although it was difficult to ascertain the man's real name, there was no doubt about his being the same that he had at first supposed him to be; that he was a great gambler and a great drunkard, — a gentleman by birth, and a man of known habits of dissipation and most indifferent fame.

"You can repeat what I have told you to your maid, Rachel; but let her understand that it is a final decision on your part, for I am quite satisfied as to the character of her admirer, whatever she may be herself."

But when Rachel came to tell Martha the further particulars that her husband had ascertained, the girl's grief was so excessive, and her entreaties that Mrs. Norreys would not dismiss her from her service until she had allowed her to speak once more to him so urgent, that she had not the heart to make the decision final.

"Well, *once* more, Martha, then," she said, — "only once more, and if you cannot satisfy yourself or me after that, we must really part."

"Indeed, ma'am!" exclaimed the poor girl, sobbing, "I wish to do what's right. I'm nearly heart-broken about it myself. I'd have slaved *for him, and* cared for him, and been turned out of every place I ever went *to for his sake*, if he had only been true to me; but if he's been telling me

falsehoods, why, I think, it will kill my love for him outright only to come to the knowledge of such. But I can't quite believe it yet, ma'am; I can't bring myself to think so badly of him without further proofs."

Her mistress tried to soothe her, although she had no consolation to give her, and she readily agreed that Martha should go the next day, unbidden, — for this one time only, — to the rooms where she had once had an interview with Mr. White before, and try to wrest the truth from his own lips.

"And if I do that, ma'am," she said, in conclusion, "I shall be satisfied ever afterwards."

The rooms were at the other side of London, and the girl was gone some hours. When she returned, Rachel was surprised that she did not seek her presence to relate the issue of her journey, but Martha never appeared. Going into her bedroom, at dusk, her mistress perceived her busy over the contents of a chest of drawers.

"Well, Martha!" she said, interrogatively.

Her maid turned round upon her almost as if she were angry; certainly, as if she had received some insult, though not from Rachel's hands.

"Please don't speak to me of it, ma'am!" she exclaimed, passionately; "please never mention it again, or I shall go out of my mind."

"But I must know from yourself whether you are to remain in my service or not, Martha. You know the conditions."

The girl came towards her mistress, in the dusk, and fell upon her knees, sobbing bitterly.

"Yes; please ma'am, if you will — forever. You are the only one as ever I saw that seems to take any real interest in me. Who else should I go to? But please don't speak to me about it, or I shall die!"

And in the violence of her emotion, and the working in her face occasioned by her wounded pride and betrayed feeling, Martha really looked as if she could be capable, under aggravation, of making away with herself. The mood of ill-concealed passion and dark remorse which seemed to possess her servant made Rachel timid, and she said no more to her that night. But the next day, when she had cooled down a little, Martha sought her mistress of her own accord, and told her all she wished to know. How when she went to the rooms of the man who had said he loved her, thus unexpectedly, she had met, not with him — but with something much worse in her feminine ideas — with a woman, who had made it pretty plain to her, and in unvarnished language, who she was, and why she had a better right to be there than Martha herself.

"Not that I wished to stop one minute, ma'am, after I heard who she was," said the poor girl, proudly; "and I wouldn't enter those doors again, nor listen to what he has to say, by word or letter, for all the wealth of India. But I thought I'd better write plainly and tell him what I feel; and please, ma'am, I've got a few little trifles here as he gave me, and if you'd be kind enough to let me make them up into a parcel, with my letters, and take them this evening to the Parcel Delivery Office — I am thinking it's the last time I'll trouble you to give me leave to go walking for some weeks to come."

And then, as Rachel began to approve her resolution and to compassionate her for its necessity, Martha gave a tremendous gulp and said, whilst her full lips trembled, —

"I'd rather never speak of it again, ma'am! please to forget as I ever kept company with any one — for I *did* love him very truly, and I must allow that he hasn't behaved as he should have done to me. I am very much obliged to you, ma'am, for all your kindness — but I know I can get over it, if I try — and I mean to do it." And with the same resolution, born of Pride, Martha Wilson turned energetically upon her heel, and left the room, bearing her ill-fated presents with her.

But Rachel, with all her pity, was very elate at the success of her undertaking. She felt that this girl, in whom she took a lively interest, had been saved through her agency. She was anxious to communicate the determination that Martha Wilson had arrived at to her husband, who had also interested himself, for her sake, on her maid's behalf, and full of this intention she ran down stairs to find him. She was not disappointed, for he was in the dining-room, and alone, apparently engaged in reading some letters.

which he had just received by the afternoon's post. As Rachel had flown down stairs, brimful of her good news, and feeling more than ordinarily brave after the success of her undertaking, the thought flashed through her mind that she might now find courage to tell Raymond that love-secret which was also oppressing her own heart.

"Now," she thought to herself, "will be a good opportunity, if he is alone —for he will look pleased at what I have to tell him! (I know he will because he's so generous), and then I shall have to thank him, and whilst I thank him, surely, it will not be so hard to say — 'Dear Raymond, I love you — indeed I do.' Not if his eyes look kind as they did yesterday, I am sure it will not, and any way I will try; it is but a few words to say — and then it will be all over." Full of this great idea, Rachel burst almost breathless into the dining-room, and saw her husband alone, and busied with his letters. He did not look up as she entered, but that was too trivial a circumstance for her to feel alarmed at, and she stepped towards him, her cheeks glowing like a rose, her bright eyes lighted up with intelligence and affection.

"Raymond!" she exclaimed, "I have something to tell you. I want to speak to you."

He raised his eyes then, and encountering her graceful little figure and excited face, he gave a heavy sigh and rose to confront her. But when his glance met Rachel's, she felt her own grow dull and misty; for his was cooler, sterner, and more distant than she had ever seen it look before.

"I also want to speak to you," he said, with a grand displeasure in his voice. "By this afternoon's post I received this letter, and I want your explanation of its contents." And as he spoke, he threw two or three separate sheets of paper upon the table, and a tiny packet amongst them tied up in cotton wool and card-board.

Rachel looked at them and him in blank amazement.

"Raymond," she exclaimed, hurriedly, "what do you mean — what have I to do with these letters, or they with me? who wrote them?"

"Of that, perhaps, you will be the better able to judge after you have examined them," he continued, coldly. "I have no knowledge on the subject, and no wish to ascertain any. All that I am desirous of hearing is your denial of their contents;" and he took up a newspaper and pretended to read it, with the intention of proving that he was perfectly at his ease, but in reality to hide the rapid changes which were taking place in his countenance.

Rachel Norreys felt that she was the subject of some accusation, but had no idea of what. The very knowledge though, that Raymond considered there was a doubt of her being able to refute the charge brought against her (whatever it might be), brought all her natural pride, heightened by the consciousness of her own innocence, to her aid, and she advanced towards the table where the papers lay with a bearing that was eminently haughty.

"If the contents consist of any imputations against me hitherto unknown to yourself," she said, indignantly, "I can deny them before I know what they are."

His face, hidden by the large sheet of newspaper, assumed a look of triumph as he heard her words, but he merely answered, —

"Be so good as to read them first, Rachel, and we will discuss the truth of them afterwards;" and applied himself afresh to his reading.

And then, with one wounded look at the newspaper of mingled love and indignation, Rachel took the letters in her hand, and commenced to peruse them. But the first paper she glanced at she let fall again upon the table, with a cry of half horror and half fear. At that sound the face behind the newspaper blanched with its distress, but Raymond neither moved nor spoke. The words which had so appalled Rachel were headed "copy," and ran thus, —

"Jack saw Harris at orderly hour this morning, and heard the bad news. How my heart bleeds for you, my dearest girl. But you are a naughty little puss to run to Master Cecil Craven for consolation. I have no doubt he was an *immense comfort* to you, and that he found a certain lady's bedroom a very pleasant billet; but that's a sort of game you mustn't play at so often, Miss Rachel, or you'll find it dangerous. I shouldn't be at all

surprised myself if Master C. C. presents himstlf at the window to-morrow morning again, armed with a fresh stock of consolation. You sly puss?"

And here the "copy" ended.

She caught it up again and looked at it, and let it drop, when she had mastered its contents, without a word, except the low exclamation of "My God!" which escaped her lips when she had finished it. She had turned deadly pale though during the process, and as she reached forth her hand for another sheet of paper, it trembled visibly. She knew it would contain some fresh charge against her, for the whole of the injury intended had flashed through her quick understanding directly she had seen of what the first was a transcription; but just then her head was too giddy, her heart too troubled, herself altogether taken too much by surprise, to have time to stop and think who was her enemy.

The next paper she examined was in her husband's handwriting, and was part of a torn and disregarded letter: —

"I shall write to you —
and that when we next
right than I have now to sign myself,

"Your devoted husband,
"RAYMOND NORREYS."

"What is this folly all about?" she said, finding her tongue when the foregoing scrap had passed through her hands. "This is simply part of a torn letter that some one, God knows why, must have extracted from my waste-paper basket months ago. It is one of your old letters, Raymond."

"I know it," he replied, shortly.

The next piece of writing that she examined was not so easily recognized by her. It was a letter written in a coarse and unfamiliar hand, and purported to be addressed to Raymond Norreys, from a friend; but it bore no signature or date, and was indited on a common sheet of note-paper. Rachel turned it over and over, as if she was trying to guess at its transcriber, before she set herself to read it through. It was as follows: —

"To Mr. Norreys.

"Sir, — This comes from a friend. Don't take Mrs. Norreys to Craven Court too often; and if you wish to know the reason of my warning, ask her yourself, if (when you were away, and she was with the regiment in Gibraltar) Major Craven was not in the habit of going into her bedroom, of kissing her, calling her by her Christian name, and otherwise misbehaving himself. If she denies it, show her the inclosed note and gold stud; the one was addressed to herself, the other was found beneath her bed. I need not say to whom it belonged, as it bears his monogram. To prove that I have a right to warn you, and am telling the truth, I send a piece of one of your own letters found thrown away by her hand. Major Craven is about to marry a noble young lady, which, under these circumstances, is not right; so I have taken the liberty of apprising the Countess of Riversdale, and also Mrs. Craven, of the above facts.

"I am, sir, yours, etc.,
"A WELL-WISHER."

The handwriting of the foregoing epistle was so formal and unlike that of an educated person, and at the same time the phraseology was so correct, that Rachel, coupling both circumstances with the facts mentioned, had no hesitation in fixing the deed of darkness upon the shoulders of Caroline Wilson, particularly as the woman's dislike of herself was so well known. She was *very, very* white when she had finished reading the words of the "Well-wisher," but she summoned sufficient courage to untie next the little packet of card and cotton wool, from which fell Cecil's gold stud, with his monogram, C. C., deeply and plainly cut into the metal. She had been already too much shocked and astonished by what she had become acquainted with, to feel any fresh surprise at its appearance.

"How strange!" she murmured to herself, as she took it up and examined it, remembering the circumstances under which it had been lost; "how very strange! It can come from no other than that fiend, Caroline

Wilson." And then apparently remembering that her husband was waiting for her explanation of these facts, she turned towards him hastily. "Raymond, you do not believe what this letter insinuates?"

"I believe nothing as yet, Rachel. I only wait for your denial to utterly disbelieve the whole. Is it true, or not?"

"What?" she said, with an increasing agitation, as she remembered that she could not deny the stubborn facts, however false the deduction drawn from them.

"That note," continued Raymond. "Did you ever receive one like it?"

"Yes, from Elise, — we wrote to each other constantly. This is a copy of one of hers."

"But the allusion in it — to — to — Craven, — what truth is there in that?"

"None that I need be ashamed of," said Rachel, more boldly, as she saw the necessity for boldness. "It is true that Cecil Craven *did* come into my bedroom when I was very unhappy about my father's illness; but Elise made a great deal more out of the circumstance than it was worth."

"Was that stud found beneath your bed, Rachel?"

"I do not know," she answered. "I have not seen it since the day that Major Craven lost it."

"It is his, then?"

She bowed her head in silence. An intense horror was creeping over her as the unanswerable nature of the evidence gathered against her innocence broke upon her mind.

"Where was it lost?"

"In my room. At the same time I spoke of before."

"Has Craven ever kissed you, Rachel?" She made no reply, but colored visibly. "Will you answer me?" exclaimed Raymond, rising, and throwing away his newapaper.

"Sometimes," she faltered.

"*Sometimes!*" he shouted. "Good Heavens, do you dare to stand there and tell me '*sometimes*,' as if sometimes were nothing? Am I to understand that that man has been in your bedroom, has kissed you, has called you 'Rachel,' and that your names have been pulled through the dirt together?"

"If you knew all ——" she commenced.

"If I knew all," he returned. "I do know all. I have seen that man's arm around your waist with my own eyes; I have heard rumors of your intimacy with him from the first day that I rejoined you; rumors that I would not credit without the evidence of my own senses; but I see it all now as clear as the light of God's day. Why was I such a fool as not to have seen it before? This is the secret of the pleasant greeting you prepared for me on my arrival! This is the reason of your disquietude, — your melancholy, — your unfulfilled wifehood! I see it all!"

"No, no!" she cried; "it is not so, — you are mistaken, Raymond!"

"What is it then?" he answered. "Explain it away if you can. What is the problem of your interest in this man?" She could not speak. She shivered beneath the inward knowledge that she *must* not speak. "Explain it if you can," he repeated, in a voice of thunder, "or, by Heavens, consider everything at an end between us."

"Raymond," she said, and although her body trembled her voice was firm; "I cannot deny what these letters assert to be the truth. I see that I am caught in a terrible net, woven by some enemy of yours or mine, and there appears no means of escape for me. But my lips are sealed. I am bound by an oath, and I must not tell you, what (if I could) would clear all your suspicions away directly. Cecil Craven has never made love to me; of that be certain. But it is all that I can tell you."

"Not made love to you!" exclaimed her husband. "How dare you say so, when by your own account he has kissed you, loitered in your bedroom — (Good God! that I should live to hear it!) and his attentions *been* remarked by all the regiment. And it is not the first time, mind you, *that I have* heard rumors of this. Rachel, you must deny it, or you must *not. I will* have no betwixt and between in such a matter."

"I *cannot* deny it," she said, mournfully, and her attitude of despair had assumed so much the appearance of a consciousness of undisputable guilt, that her husband was misled by it.

"You *cannot* deny it," he repeated, slowly. "You, the wife (or intended so to be) of an honorable man, — cannot deny that in his absence (an absence during which, so help me Heaven, Rachel, I lived for you alone) you admitted a stranger to such familiar intercourse with yourself, that his unstained name (that you unworthily bore) was branded by the lookers-on, and linked with another's. You cannot deny that your lips (those lips which you should have kept sacred to myself) have been polluted by another man's touch, and that such an occurrence was so common as to be known amongst your household. As soon as you saw those letters you guessed they came from Mrs. Wilson. You were evidently aware that even your father's servants knew of your disgrace."

"My father himself knew of my intimacy with Cecil Craven, and approved of it," said Rachel, proudly. "I can say no more to you in my defence than that, Raymond."

"Oh, hush!" he exclaimed; "be silent. Don't try to lay upon the shoulders of the dead a fault which is yours alone. I know your father to have been an honest man, Rachel; would I could think the same of you as a woman."

Here his voice broke down, and the miserable sound overcame the girl, in her state of agitation and distress. And she had run down stairs that evening with so different a hope — so great an expectation from this interview with her husband which was ending so sadly for them both.

"Raymond!" she screamed, as the signs of his emotion met her ear, and rushed almost into his very arms as she spoke. "Raymond, don't believe it, for God's sake don't believe it; it is not true! I never loved him as you think. I never loved a man in that way except yourself, and that but lately. You said that you would only hear it from my own lips, and I have been too foolish yet to tell you; but I *do* love you, Raymond, and I was coming down this very afternoon to tell you so, when you were reading those horrible letters. Oh, Raymond, I *love you!* Believe it if you will, or not; I love you only, and I will be your faithful wife henceforward if you will only have it so. "And Rachel's agitation and excitement gave way beneath a torrent of tears, half occasioned by her grief, half by her shame.

At any other time Raymond Norreys would have leaped with joy to hear those long-wished-for words bursting with so much mingled modesty and love from Rachel's trembling lips, and even now a flush of pleasure mounted to his dark forehead, which seemed for the moment almost to wipe out the remembrance of his impending misery. But only for a moment. In the next he thought upon his wrong, and put her from him.

"Once more; will you deny the charge against you, Rachel?"

"I cannot deny," she repeated, sadly. "What I have already said is true."

And then his transitory flush of pleasure died away, and he only remembered that the woman before him had once been false, and was probably false again. Her avowal of love for himself was only a piece of feminine acting, an artful *ruse* to turn away his anger and his accusation from her, and by taking advantage of his weakness, to shield herself from the consequences of her crime.

Else, why had the confession been delayed till now? And, thinking thus, he flung himself away from her, and exclaimed, impetuously, —

"Then come no more with your false tales of love for me, and me only; when to deny this accusation would be so foul a lie, that even your double nature revolts from it. You have deceived me, Rachel, grossly and most unwarrantably deceived me, and I trust your words no more. You have laid yourself open to the worst suspicions, and to having them made public; you have forever closed all intimacy with the Cravens for us, and raised up a barrier between yourself and me which will take a weary while to break down again. Go! I'll have none of your love; I want none of it; keep it for the next man that thinks it worth his while to receive your hands."

Rachel stood paralyzed. She had betrayed her cherished secret. She had told this man, her husband, after a mighty effort, that she *loved* him, and he had spurned her love, — refused it, — stung and insulted her into the bargain.

This girl was proud by nature, and self-willed, and dominant. She had not been used to stoop to offer, still less to be refused; and although the worst phases of her character had lately been kept in abeyance (not only by the melancholy turn her mind had taken, but also by her growing love for Raymond), they were only so kept, not uprooted. And now they came into full force and action. Rachel Norreys in her every-day mood was an uncertain creature to deal with; but Rachel Norreys, roused as she was now, by the man she had learnt almost to worship, was a Fury, — not a woman. Despised, rejected, cast out from his embrace, to tell her love for whom she had made so great a struggle! She could scarcely understand such treatment, and, understanding it, she could not bear it. With fire flashing from her irradiated eyes, with her delicate nostrils distended, and her tender hands clenched upon one another, she confronted Raymond Norreys, and forced him to listen to her. Her words were few, but she said them almost as solemnly as if she knew they were to be her last.

"Raymond, tell me all the truth. Of *what* do you suspect me?"

"God knows," he answered, passionately. "I don't know myself where suspicion ends and certainty commences:" and gathering up the scattered papers as he spoke, he left the room.

She looked after him for a few moments as if she had been turned to marble, the heavy breathing which lifted the folds across her bosom being the only signs of life she gave. And when he had left her presence and the house (as she could hear him shortly do), Rachel walked deliberately up-stairs to her bedroom and assumed her walking garb. She was permitted to do so undisturbed, for Martha Wilson had gone to the office with her parcel, and her mother and sister-in-law were out for their usual drive. And then she took her purse out of her pocket and mechanically counted its contents.

Yes, there was plenty there for her purpose. She had always a liberal supply of money accorded her by Raymond. When she had finished her preparations, she deliberately turned to leave the house. The one great pervading idea in her mind being that she would no longer bear his name, nor eat his bread, nor live beneath his roof, whilst this great stigma lay upon her head, and that she must seek those who could remove it from her, and if they refused to do so, she would die. But she could not carry out her purpose altogether so bravely as she had first intended.

"Suspected," she said to herself, to raise her courage as she descended the staircase, "suspected of wrong, and openly rejected, and by Raymond, whilst I, with oath-bound lips, am powerless to cry out or save myself!"

"Oh, father! would that you had died before you spoke, and buried your cruel secret with you in the grave. Oh, Raymond!" she added, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, as she passed the oaken doors, and knew that the next minute would see her beyond the iron portals, which she might never again cross, — "Oh, Raymond! dearest love (who could have been scarce dearer as my husband), God forever protect and keep you, though you should never know my innocence, or we two meet again!" And then with a low, stifled cry of "Father, would we were together!" Rachel Norreys passed, without further comment or warning, from the gates of her husband's home, into the stream of mingled life which flows along the streets of the Great City.

CHAPTER XXVI.

RACHEL'S FLIGHT.

By the time that Rachel Norreys had passed through the gates of Abbey *dge into the* broad thoroughfare beyond, the October afternoon had sub- *d into a foggy* evening, and the lamps of London were lighted.

Rachel had come to the determination to leave her home very suddenly, but not so suddenly as to prevent her having fully formed the plans she intended to pursue. Cabs and railway stations were no novelties to her, and she had little fear of journeying alone. Her object was to go to the Court, and there see Cecil Craven; and, with that end in view, Waterloo Station must first be gained. And so, when her feet were turned away from the iron gate with that passionate plaint upon her lips, they were set in the direction of Knightsbridge and the Strand. She was so far beside herself that she did not at first think of hailing a cab, although the driver of every empty one that passed, implored her, with frantic gestures of his whip, to take a seat inside it. But the foggy air was cool and refreshing to her inflamed and heated face, and her head was full of bitter, miserable thoughts, which prevented her taking any heed to the failing of her feet and her increasing fatigue, but hurried her onwards towards her destination. Two ladies returning home in a brougham caught a glimpse of her drooping figure as it passed hastily beneath the lamplight, and the younger of the two had let down the misty glass, and looked after it as she said, —

"There's a lady walking, mamma, so like Rachel, and in mourning, too." And her companion had replied, —

"My dear Christine, what a nonsensical idea? — as if Rachel would be out at this time of night, and alone;" for the fast-descending darkness made six o'clock seem almost night; and so the failing figure passed away into the gloom, and was forgotten, and the brougham rolled on towards the Abbey Lodge.

But Rachel Norreys was not fated to reach the Waterloo Station that evening unobserved. Martha Wilson, returning from her very unsatisfactory errand, met the black-robed lady in the shadows, and, turning to look after her, marked something familiar in her hurried step, and followed her until the next lamp disclosed — for Rachel wore no veil — the familiar features also.

"It *is* my mistress," soliloquized Martha, with amazement. "What on earth can she be doing here alone?"

For such an occurrence had never taken place since Martha entered service at the Abbey Lodge — that either of the young ladies should thread the streets unattended. Mrs. Norreys would heve been shocked at such a proposition even in broad daylight; but dark, and with the lamps lit, Martha, when she thought of it, could scarcely believe that her eyes were not playing her a trick.

"It *can't* be Mrs. Raymond," she said, as she passed her hand over the offending members; "and yet it must be, for I'd know her walk amongst a thousand, and I saw her face just now as plain as day. Anyway, I must satisfy myself, for it's the most curious thing I've come across for ever so long."

And with this intention Martha retraced her steps, and followed quickly in the track of Rachel's retreating form. In the mean while she, wholly unheeding who should see or follow her, was only conscious that her limbs were failing, and that she could not walk much further. And once roused to noticing the fact, she discovered that she was very tired indeed, not being used to much walking, and that she had already taxed her strength almost beyond its powers. She had reached New Brompton by this time, and was near a cab-stand.

"How stupid of me not to have taken a cab at once," she thought, as she held up her hand. "I should have saved myself so much fatigue, and perhaps I have lost a train by the negl[illegible] To the Waterloo Station," she said, as she jumped into it, full of the latter fear, "and drive as quickly as you can."

But before the man had time to put her desire into execution, a head was thrust into the cab window, and the voice of Martha Wilson said, —

"Mrs. Norreys, ma'am, please where are you going to?"

The sound of her familiar voice seemed to rouse Rachel from a waking dream. She stared at the girl's sympathetic face for one moment, and gave vent to an exclamation of pleasure.

"May I come too, ma'am?" asked Martha, emboldened by the sound.

"Yes, yes!" said Rachel, hastily; and as soon as the words had left her lips her servant was on the opposite seat to her, and they were rattling over the stones of Knightsbridge towards the station.

As Rachel had traversed those streets alone and in the darkness, she had seemed to herself to be so utterly cut off from all with whom she had hitherto associated, that the sudden and unexpected appearance of Martha had come as a prestige that she still belonged, and should some day return to them. But the next moment she recalled her intended destination and her purpose, and, remembering that she had not wished to leave a trace behind her of where she had retreated, felt sorry that she had allowed Martha to accompany her even part of the way. So she sat silent until she reached the station, leaning back in the dark cab, and rendering even the shadows on her face invisible; and it was not the servant's part to break the reserve her mistress chose to maintain between them. But when they had arrived at Waterloo, and were about to descend upon the platform, Rachel said, hurriedly, putting money into the other's hand, —

"Martha, I am going into the country on business for a few days, and I do not want you to accompany me any further; so take this money, drive home in this same cab, pay and dismiss the man at the Abbey Lodge. You will hear all about me to-morrow."

But there was a wildness in her eye; a hurried, tremulous cadence in her voice; an ill-concealed agitation pervading her whole address; which told her servant that there was something wrong. She received the money with thanks, and suffered her mistress to depart into the station, under the imagination that she was about to comply with her wishes; but when she was fairly lost to view, Martha paid the cabman his fare to Waterloo, and bade him drive away.

"There are plenty more cabs for me to return to Brompton in," she thought to herself, "when I am sure that my mistress isn't coming to any harm. I can't make it out at all. I left her right enough this afternoon, to my thinking, but there's something gone wrong now, or my name's not Martha. And she's been too good lately, bless her! to let me feel comfortable unless I'm sure that she is so too. I must speak to her again before she starts, and make sure that it is all right."

But Martha's settlement with the cabman out of an unchanged sovereign, and her subsequent soliloquy and fear of following her mistress too soon, had kept her longer than was necessary upon the outer platform; for Rachel, on entering the station, had found a crush of people waiting to get their tickets, and, on inquiry, had ascertained that the half-past six train for Weybridge would start immediately.

"Any luggage, miss?" the porter had asked. "You had better get your ticket, for the bell will ring directly."

And so when Martha followed her, the station was comparatively empty, and Rachel was already seated in the railway carriage. The girl had guessed her mistress meant Weybridge by "the country," for she knew that she had lately come to England, and had not many friends, and so her first inquiry of the first man she encountered, was, —

"Is the Weybridge train gone, sir?"

"Not yet," was the answer, "but just moving;" and Martha rushed upon the platform as he spoke.

Rachel's head was thrust out of the carriage window, as if she had almost expected her; but, in reality, she was bidding a mental farewell to the place which was her husband's home. Martha was by the side of the moving train, directly.

"Ma'am!" she exclaimed. "You've taken me so of a sudden, and you've said so little, that I feel quite frightened, and don't know what to think! When will you be back, ma'am, please?"

"I don't know," exclaimed Rachel, in her parting agitation. "I am not sure;" and then (with a sudden thought of the pain she would cause them at the Lodge by her flight, and unknown destination), she exclaimed, "Tell them at home, that I shall be quite safe, — that I am gone to Mrs. Craven's," — and then the engine gave a hoarse shriek, and the station and Martha were things of the past.

"It can make no difference," thought Rachel, as she lay back wearily upon the cushion, "if they know where I am gone, or not. Raymond is *too proud* to reclaim me, until I wish to return to him, and that will be *probably* — *never*. Never, now, at all events, until I bear an unblemished *name, and he asks* me to do so."

And as the remembrance of her rejected offer returned to poor Rachel's mind, she colored with her shame and misery, — and closed her eyes lest the other passengers might read her story in their troubled depths. But her last words to Martha on the platform, had satisfied that young woman that something *was* wrong, as she had suspected.

"*Tell them at home*," she repeated to herself, as the long line of carriages left the station. "Then they don't know at the Lodge, as Mrs. Raymond is travelling alone, that's evident; and it must be something very out of the common to take her away at this time of night. At home! No, they must find it out the same way I have, by using their senses, — for my place is to follow her. It's nothing to me, now, if mother, or all the world knows where I am; and she's been too good to me, she has, for me to desert her when she will want me, most likely. Why, she may have gone clean out of her senses, — it looks like it when she goes tearing about the country like mad. Anyway, I'll be with her at Weybridge, to-night, even if she sends me back to the Lodge to-morrow. Please, which is the next train to Weybridge?" she inquired of one of the officials near.

"Quarter-past seven," he replied, and for three-quarters of an hour Martha paced the platform, or sat in the second-class waiting-room, puzzling her brain for some satisfactory reason of her young mistress's sudden flight and mysterious silence.

And Rachel, meanwhile, wrapt in her own misery, was flying onwards, to the Weybridge station. It was half-past seven when she arrived there; but there was no lack of vehicles to take her to the Court.

"I shall find them all at dinner," she thought to herself, as the hired carriage turned into the drive-gates, and rattled up the long avenue. "I must ask to speak to Cecil alone, first, for I could not tell the wretched story before Mrs. Craven."

But when the fly drew up before the portico of the house itself, and Rachel looked out eagerly, although she knew not why, — she was surprised to see that the Court was wrapped in darkness, and that there were little signs of life about it.

"They must have gone out to dinner, somewhere," was her first idea, as the flyman's summons was answered by a maid-servant, with a flaring candle. There were plenty of men-servants left in the house, but they were having a late dinner in the lower regions with a few choice friends, and therefore the answering of the door-bell was left to any one who would take the trouble to do it.

"Is Mrs. Craven gone out?" was Rachel's first inquiry.

"Nobody's to home," was the uncouth reply.

"Where are they gone to?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'll send somebody," and the girl and her candle disappeared together, leaving Rachel and the flyman, for about ten minutes, in total darkness.

"Don't appear as if any one was alive about here," was that gentleman's jocular remark, as he leant his hand upon the window-sash, and smiled confidentially at his fare. He thought there seemed a good chance of making a double business of it, and taking her back to the station again. But the ten minutes were over at last, and then the housekeeper, hearing there was a lady inquiring for Mrs. Craven, did Rachel the honor to bring herself up-stairs.

"Lor', Mrs. Norreys!" she exclaimed, "who'd have thought of seeing you, ma'am? The stupid gal said as 'twas a lady of middle age. I hope nothing's gone wrong at Brompton, ma'am. I suppose you know as Mrs. Craven is down at Brighton, for a few weeks?"

"No, indeed, I did not," said poor Rachel, feeling how awkward her appearance there, without the support of the family, must seem.

"Is Major Craven at Brighton, also, or with his regiment?"

"Major Craven was here only yesterday, ma'am, to fetch a few things of his ma's which he was to take to Brighton for her, and he went, I believe, this morning. But he told me he was going to bring some friends here, for shooting, the day after to-morrow. So perhaps he is back at the camp by this time. You wished to see Mrs. Craven, ma'am?"

"Yes; I want to speak to her and Major Craven on business," repli

Rachel, her spirits at their very lowest ebb. "I suppose I should be almost certain of catching Major Craven at Brighton to-morrow?"

"Well, ma'am, I can't say, I'm sure, not knowing. Will you sleep here, to-night, ma'am?"

And the housekeeper did not look as if she seconded the proposal very warmly; "The house was clear of all noosances, thank 'evin, for the present, and she didn't want to be fussing over Mrs. Norreys, — nor any one else," as she hospitably observed, when she returned to her co-mates. And Rachel remembered that she had brought no luggage; and shrank from the exposure which the knowledge of that fact would render inevitable; and so she tried to answer, briskly, that she had no such intention, and indeed only came to see Mrs. or Major Craven. And then, having procured their sea-side address, she wished Mrs. Watson good night," and told the flyman to drive back again; but once outside the gates, she bethought her of her friend Elise Arundel. Her cottage was close at hand, — it was better she should go there for the night than to an inn, and Elise, she was sure, would be glad to see her. Caroline Wilson was there, certainly, and Rachel was not desirous of meeting her just now; so sure was she of the woman's guilt; but even mixed up with that feeling came a courageous wish to confront her enemy, and boldly tax her with being the author of the anonymous letters, which had so destroyed her peace. And she would tell Elise also. Elise, who had half suspected Caroline of treachery, at Gibraltar, and who, with such convincing proofs set before her of the truth of her suspicions, would surely dismiss her from her service and have no more to do with her. And, although her friend could not help her, as far as that cruel oath bound her lips, still Elise knew she was innocent, and it would be something to tell her all her trouble, and to hear her say so.

And so the flyman was ordered to drive to Laburnum Cottage. But here the same want of success seemed to pursue poor Rachel; for the cottage, too, was very dark, and repeated ringings at the bell only brought an old woman with weak eyes to the door, who appeared to know nothing, except that Mrs. Arundel was not at home — down by the sea somewhere, she had heard, with the lady from over there (her palsied head indicating Craven Court, as she spoke); but she wasn't sure. Miss Emily was gone too, any way.

"And where is Mrs. Wilson?" Rachel next asked.

"Mrs. Wilson was gone out to tea somewhere, she believed — or into the town. She couldn't say. She'd been up to London yesterday — maybe she had gone again. Would the lady walk in?"

Yes, the lady (with a dim sense of waiting till Caroline's return, and then accusing her of her double dealing) would walk in and sit down for a few minutes. Another thought had also struck Rachel upon hearing of her friend's absence: she must sleep then at Weybridge, and she would borrow the few articles she required for the night from Mrs. Arundel's wardrobe. There could be nothing remarkable in taking such a liberty between two friends as close as she and Eliza had been; for they had often, when necessity required it, shared each other's belongings, as if they were their own. And so Rachel entered Laburnum Cottage, and desired the flyman to wait for her return, and the old woman to show her the way to Mrs. Arundel's bedroom.

"I am an old friend of your mistress," she said in explanation, "and I want to take one or two things out of her room. I shall leave a note for Mrs. Wilson, if she does not return before I leave, to say that I have done so."

And then the old woman, too stupid to feel astonished, lighted another candle, and showed Rachel the way up to the first floor. It was a small room, and left in the greatest disorder, for Eliza Arundel was an untidy woman, and Caroline Wilson had had apparently too much business of her own to transact since her departure, to find time to arrange her mistress's wardrobe. The bed was unmade; the toilet-table was strewn with brushes, combs, bottles and bijouterie; and piled upon the chairs were various articles of clothing, just as they had been heaped there, when taken out from the chest of drawers for Mrs. Arundel to make a selection of what she

wished packed for her sea-side journey. As Rachel entered and held the candle above her head, she thought that tallow dip had never flared upon a scene of greater confusion than that which met her eye, and she despaired at first of finding what she wanted. But setting down her candlestick (the old woman having beaten a retreat to the lower regions, whence she had been disturbed over her "drop o' tea"), Rachel commenced patiently to withdraw article after article from the piles of linen, as she searched for what she required. Even as she did so, and one or two trifles appeared amongst them that she had herself given to her friend, the warm feelings with which she had, even until lately, regarded Mrs. Arundel, rose up afresh in Rachel's heart, as the sight of her own little offerings, thus preserved, awakened the memory of the days when they were used to be so very closely united.

"Dear Elise," she thought, "I believe she cares for me more truly than any one else in the world. We have been rather separated of late, what with her sorrow and my new interests; but both seem passing away together, and perhaps before long we may come to be again what we have been — almost sisters."

And in the prospect of such a reunion, Rachel placed back into their places the little gifts which had emanated from herself, almost reverentially. As she did so, she moved some other item of the carelessly-arranged heap, and threw a blotting-book upon the ground. It was a gaudy blotting-book, one of those with pockets which let out their contents upon the slightest provocation; and as it fell, every paper it contained lay scattered on the ground. Provoked at her own awkwardness, Rachel knelt upon the floor the better to collect the fallen sheets, and to replace them in their former receptacle. But with the first that she took into her hand, a loud exclamation burst from her lips, and she rose up hastily, and brought the light to bear upon the writing. Good heavens! the same — the very same, or so it looked — that Raymond had placed into her hands that day. There were the identical words, in the same characters, and even position: "To Mr. Norreys. Sir, — This comes from a friend!"

Had she then stumbled on the very proofs of Caroline Wilson's villany? Would her tongue be spared the loathsome task of accusation, and all her trouble be, to thrust these tell-tale sheets before her eyes, and dare her to deny they were her handiwork? Excited to the last degree, Rachel gathered up the remainder of the papers, and found they were mostly duplicates, or nearly so — evidently the trials which had been made before perfection in deception had been obtained. But as she sorted them, she came upon one which had been scribbled on, perhaps in a moment of self-reproachful thought — a moment when conscience had stayed the pen, and the writer had been forced to pause in her work of falsehood, and reinforce her courage before she could proceed; and pausing thus, not knowing what she did, had let her fingers move mechanically, and write not once or twice, but a dozen times her name, and the detection to her lie, "Eliza Arundel."

Good Lord! was it possible? By all the words, the promises, the mutual kindness which had passed between them; by all the laws of friendship, the sacredness of truth, the horror and the infamy of falsehood, was it possible that her betrayer, her enemy, the one who had so basely come behind the shield of an anonymous signature, between her husband and herself, and parted them perhaps forever, was Eliza Arundel? — the woman who had professed to be her bosom friend, the one most interested in her career; her almost sister?"

Oh! shame upon such friendship! Silence forever on so false a tongue! Tears, and our bitterest, for such outraged womanhood!

As the conviction of the dupe she had been made, broke upon Rachel's mind, she let the papers fall from her lap upon the floor again, and laying down her head upon the table, cried as if her heart would break.

Sobs of strong pain, and gasps for the relief of nature, had burst from her as she stood an apparent criminal, convicted by the words of this false friend, before her husband's sight; deep sighs, and almost groans, had rent her tortured bosom as she sped along upon her solitary journey, and felt each mile so quickly traversed, took her further from him and from he

home, perhaps never to return; but no such tears had fallen from her eyes through all that day of pain, as came in showers from them now, when the thought of Eliza Arundel's treachery pressed upon her heart. They washed away before them a faith of years, a faith in all that was good and true and warm hearted; for Rachel had loved this woman from association, although there was so little really to love or admire in her character. They had been more separate of late, because with Rachel, Love, as a passion the most potent of all feelings, had stepped between their hearts, usurping the powers of her own, and occupying her best thoughts; and when that is the case, women must expect to suffer a decrease of interest in the bosoms of their own sex. It is but right and natural it should be so, since Heaven decreed it; but still, with all that, Rachel had cared more for Mrs. Arundel than for any other female friend, and would have almost pledged her own life upon the the faith of her affection.

And the work, the glance of a moment, and that moment an accidental one, had broken down all this forever. As Rachel leant her head upon her hands, and cried for the desolation which the truth she had discovered seemed to create in her own breast, for the lowering which her sex had suffered in her eyes, the tears seemed to wipe out everything but a sense of the great wrong which she had suffered.

When she had at last exhausted all her grief, and, outwardly calm, rose up with the blotting-book and its collected papers in her hand, the name of Eliza Arundel bore no longer the same signification to her that it had done before. Her bosom friend was melted, gone away, had never been, and she left her room prepared to seek and to confront an enemy of her own sex, to meet her as woman injured to woman injuring; and no two foes can be better matched to close with one another in the battles of life and love. Her object then was, not to meet Mrs. Wilson, lest the possession of her prize should be disputed; she therefore prepared at once to quit the cottage, and scribbling on a piece of paper that she had taken from a blotting-case in Mrs. Arundel's bedroom, signed it with her name, and left it with the old woman, to be delivered to Caroline on her return.

Then, getting once more into the waiting fly, she desired the coachman to drive her to the Railway Hotel, at Weybridge, where she could pass the night, and be ready the first thing in the morning to start for Brighton. She felt impatient with the hours of darkness for going so slowly; she could not sleep even when she had laid herself down upon a bed, but lay awake, panting for the moment when she should stand once more in the presence of Eliza Arundel, and tell her to her face that she was false.

And when, about ten o'clock that evening, Caroline Wilson, knocking for admittance at Laburnum Cottage, was met by the old woman, with the scrap of paper that Rachel had left behind her in her hand, and some garbled story in her mouth of how a young lady in black had been, and come, and gone, &c., &c., Mrs. Arundel's coadjutor turned deadly pale, and deplored her own misfortune in having been absent on that particular occasion.

"You old fool?" she exclaimed, turning upon the woman in her wrath, "what business had you to let any one go into the bedroom, say what they would? The very blotting-book, I declare, with the identical papers in it! A nice scrape I shall get into when Mrs. Arundel comes to hear of it, and with Wilson also, for the matter of that. There'll be a regular blow-up between them all; and why on earth I didn't pack the things away days ago, I can't imagine. But who was to think of Mrs. Norreys herself coming down upon us! Well, its a kind of fate, I suppose, and I may consider this situation as good as gone forever."

CHAPTER XXVII.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

But at this juncture a vociferous peal at the hall-bell upset Mrs. Wilson *in the midst of* her cogitations, and made her grow paler still.

"*I hope it* isn't Mrs. Norreys come back again," she exclaimed; for,

alarmed as she was at the turn affairs had taken, she was far more afraid of meeting the injured Rachel than even of encountering her infuriated mistress, such a coward had the knowledge of her share in the foul business made of her. And, therefore, having desired the old woman once more to answer the bell, and learn what was wanted at that hour of night, it was even greater joy to Caroline Wilson than it would otherwise have been, to hear the somewhat coarse tones of her daughter Martha inquiring if she were at home.

"Martha, my girl," exclaimed the mother, flying down the staircase, and drawing her daughter into the warm passage, "is it really you? What brings you back to-night, my dear? Where have you been? Are you married? Oh, Martha, what a turn you've given me!"

And here Caroline Wilson, beneath the influence of almost the only admirable trait in her character, broke down, and was unable to proceed. But Martha answered none of her questions.

"Has my mistress been here?" were all the words that broke from her eager lips.

"Your mistress, child!" ejaculated her mother. "Who is your mistress, and what makes you come asking for her here?"

"Mrs. Raymond Norreys," replied Martha; "and I've followed her from London, to-night. Is she in this house, mother?"

"And is that all you've got to say to me, Martha child, on first meeting," said Mrs. Wilson, reproachfully, "when you've led me such dances to find out your whereabouts, and made me fret more than enough into the bargain?"

"Lor', mother, I'm very sorry, I'm sure," returned the girl, giving her a hasty kiss; "but, here, I've just arrived by the train, and walked every step from the inn; lost my way twice, too, and all to find my young mistress; and so you can't be surprised that I'm anxious to have my questions answered first."

"Well, she *has* been here, Martha, but I didn't see her, being out, and she's been gone again a matter of an hour or more; and I can't tell you anything further."

"What did she come here for? to see Mrs. Arundel?"

"I suppose so."

"And where is Mrs. Arundel?"

"At Brighton, along with the Court people."

"Are they all gone, too?" exclaimed Martha. "Then you may depend on it Mrs. Raymond has followed them, or is going to, and I must be back to Weybridge."

And she almost looked as if she intended to put her design into execution at once; but here her mother interposed, and justly. There could be no train to Brighton that night, and Mrs. Norreys was not likely to go by it, if there were. She would most probably sleep at Weybridge, and travel southward on the next morning.

Martha saw the sense of this, and agreed to stay the night at Laburnum Cottage with her mother.

This point being settled, and the prodigal daughter led into the kitchen, and there set before a comfortable supper-table, her thoughts, instead of fixing themselves upon her mother and the good things before her, would fly back to her absent mistress.

"If I could only be sure now where Mrs. Raymond is, and what she is a going to do," she said, meditatively, and with utter disregard of the heaped-up plate before her, "I should feel so much easier."

But here Mrs. Wilson lost patience. They were alone now, the old woman having returned to her own home, and the mother was dying with impatience to hear the whole account of Martha's adventures since they had parted — the reason for her leaving the Court in so mysterious a manner, no less than by what strange course of events she came to call Mrs. Raymond Norreys her mistress, for this last circumstance grated strangely upon Mrs. Wilson's feelings whenever she heard it mentioned.

"Lor' bless me, Martha!" she exclaimed, pettishly; "can't you be forgetting Mrs. Raymond Norreys for half an hour, and talk of something else? She's no favorite of mine, as you have often heard, and I can't

I call it pretty behavior in you to have engaged yourself into such a family, and without saying a word to me upon the subject first; but now you've had the grace to think of coming back to your mother, you might give her a little news of yourself, instead of letting your tongue run on about a young person that I certainly never liked, and have no great opinion of."

Martha Wilson's black eyes flashed at this uncommendatory mention of her absent benefactress. She was passionate and self-willed, but she had a large bump of gratitude, and in this instance she cultivated the virtue.

"No great opinion of her, haven't you?" she echoed, rather coarsely. "Then let me tell you, mother, that you'd better not say those words before me again, or perhaps I shall say something that you would rather not hear. No great opinion, indeed! Why, Mrs. Raymond Norreys is the sweetest and best and kindest young lady as ever I came across, and I'd lay down my life for her, that I would," reiterated the excited girl, as she brought down her heavy hand upon the deal table. "Now, look here, mother," she continued, turning away from her untasted food and speaking as if she intended to be not only heard but believed; "it don't signify telling you now, because it's a past matter, and I don't much care who knows it, but what drove her away from Aldershot barracks is what drove me away from Craven Court, and that was being spied after when I wished to go my own ways. It was dislike of that, and a wish for more freedom that took me to London, and made me offer myself as lady's-maid to Mrs. Raymond Norreys, and a man was at the bottom of it all, as you may guess."

"Lor', my dear, who is he?" demanded Mrs. Wilson, interrupting her with true feminine curiosity.

"Pshaw! what signifies that?" said the girl, with a marked disdain. "You won't never know, mother, so it's no use asking; and it's got nothing to do with my story. I hadn't been in Mrs. Norreys's service long before she found out that I knew such a one, and warned me against him. I don't think she would ever have found it out of herself, bless you, she's a deal too unsuspicious; but the old lady and the other servants carried tales of me to her, and, in consequence, she told me I must give him up. She'd been so kind to me before that that I took courage to tell her the truth. No one had ever spoken to me as she had done, or I might have done the same to them. But your husband bullied me out of the barracks, and you set yourself as a judge over me, and I'm afraid I don't bear control well, mother; and from what you've told me of yourself, I should think I had most likely caught it of you. If my mistress had tried to bully me I should have left her service, but she spoke as if she felt for me, and I couldn't stand that."

"Does she know who you are?" asked Mrs. Wilson.

"No, she doesn't," was the reply.

"Ah, if she did, you'd find it would make a difference in her."

"I don't believe it," rejoined Martha, stoutly. "She know's that I'm not the daughter of honest parents, for I told her so from the very first, and she said it only made her feel for me the more."

Caroline Wilson had shuddered as her daughter put the naked truth before her thus, but she made no remark upon it, and merely said, "Go on."

"When I told her all my trouble," resumed Martha, "what did she do? turn me out, or call me names?—neither. She set herself to work to find out who the man was who I had let myself be fooled into loving, for she was afraid, being a gentleman, that he wasn't a fit acquaintance for me."

"Oh! he's never a *gentleman*, Martha," exclaimed Mrs. Wilson, clasping her hands with a vivid recollection of what the acquaintanceship of gentleman had ended in for herself.

"He *was*," answered her daughter. "He ain't nobody now, if you mean the man I love, for he's deceived me, and I shall never see him more, if I can help it."

"Deceived you, Martha; in God's name, how?" demanded the mother, anxiously.

"Not as you seem to think, mother, though it might have been so. I think it *would* have been so, except for Mrs, Raymond Norreys—except *for my* young mistress and her care of me. Why, she got even Mr. Norreys *to take* trouble for my sake, and find out all particulars about him,

until my eyes were opened, and I saw for myself that the man was playing me false, that he only wanted to ruin me, and that no good could come of it. And that's the lady you've got no opinion of, mother. The only one as has ever drawed tears from my eyes, brought sense and reason to my help, and made me see my own danger. Would you have liked to have seen me ruined, mother? Would you have been pleased to see me come home this night, and to hear me say that I never could hold up my head again amongst honest women? Because that's what would have happened to me, most likely, before now, without it had been for the young Mrs. Norreys—for the lady as you've no opinion of. But I'd lay down my life for her to-day, and will to-morrow, if required," repeated poor Martha, in the fulness of her gratitude.

Caroline Wilson had grown paler and paler during the course of her daughter's harangue. Here had her girl, for whose safety and well-being she was so anxious, been on the very brink of peril, and the woman who had saved her (when, as she said, no other could) had been the very one against whose peace of mind she had herself been plotting, in order to gratify the revenge of a mistress whom she despised and cared as little for as she did for Rachel Norreys. What would she not have given, as she sat that night listening to her daughter's recital of danger past, to have had that little note, that fragment of paper and that gold stud, once more in her own hands. But the deed was done, and not to be recalled. Good heavens! how she shivered. Was the fire lower, or had the night turned suddenly cold? Her daughter saw her agitation, and noticed it.

"You're frightened, mother," she said, "at what I've gone through, and you well may be. I'm frightened myself, sometimes to look back upon it; but it's past now, thank Heaven! I've done with it to-day, and forever. But what do you think we owe the lady who has saved me from such a fate?"

"Ah, what indeed! Something better than those treacherous, cowardly letters, that damning evidence to (at the worst) an undecided guilt, that putting upon innocent words the deadliest and most shameful of constructions. But Mrs. Wilson had not the courage at once to speak of such. She only said, in answer to her daughter's question,—

"What brought your mistress here, to-night, Martha?"

"That I cannot say," returned the girl, again interrupting herself in the midst of the supper she had commenced to attack. "You know as much as I do now, mother. I left her at home this afternoon about four o'clock, or thereabouts, and, as I thought, quite happy, except for me (and when she tried to give me comfort I saw the tears stand in her blessed eyes, I did)," said Martha, digging her knuckles into her own as she spoke, "and she gave me leave to go out on a little business of my own. Well, as I was returning—late for the time of year, six o'clock, very likely, and all the lamps lighted—whom should I meet but my young mistress, walking in the streets alone! She *never* goes out by herself in London; they're a deal too particular over her for that. Yet there she was, hurrying along, and directly I saw 'twas her I felt sure something had happened, and I cut after her as quick as I could, till I saw her call a cab against the Kensington Museum, and then I made bold to speak to her, and ask if I might go along with her; and she said yes; so I jumped in too, and we drove to the Waterloo station, and then she wanted me to go back home again, saying she didn't want me; but I couldn't feel easy, so I followed her on to the platform, just as she was leaving the station in the Weybridge train, and she calls out to me from the window: 'Tell them at home that I shall be quite safe—that I am going to Mrs. Craven's.' Then I felt sure that something was wrong, and I left them at home to take care of themselves, and followed my mistress on here by the next train. And I should have caught her in this house too, and I wish I had, except for having to walk all the way in from Weybridge. What could have happened, mother, in an hour's time, to drive her out from home like that, and to distress her so; for I could see she was nearly bursting with grief. It wasn't my place to speak to her, or I could almost have asked the question, for all the kindness she's shown me. And what can make her want to see Mrs. Arundel and Mrs. Craven? What have they to do with my mistress? Can you guess? Why, *my gracious! mother*, what's come to you?"

She might well ask. Others, who had known Caroline Wilson all her life would have stared, like Martha, to see her now, so strangely unlike her cold, unfeeling self, sink down upon her knees before her daughter, and bring her trembling hands before her face, to hide the blistering, repentant tears which trickled down her cheeks.

"And I've been saying all along," she sobbed, "that I could cut off my right hand to do a service for the creature as would bring you back to me, and this is the end of it! Driven from her home!—alone and suspected, and through me! Oh, Lor'! shall I ever forgive myself?"

Martha heard the words, and starting up, shook of her mother's grasp, and stood aloof from her.

"What!" she exclaimed, "what do you say? Had you anything to do with this, mother—any hand in my young mistress's trouble? God forgive you, if you have! Tell me!" she added, energetically—"tell me the truth! I will have it?"

"It wasn't me exactly," whined her mother—"indeed it wasn't, Martha; but Mrs. Norreys has been here in my absence, and found out everything for herself, I expect, and therefore I need not keep it a secret from you, since you wish to serve her. It is my mistress, Mrs. Arundel, as has had a spite against her for a long time past."

"Had a spite against her!" ejaculated Martha. "Why, I thought they were such friends?"

"Yes, till a man came between them," said her mother. "You'll generally find a man a powerful enough reason to put the nearest friends asunder, Martha; and then Mrs. Arundel turned against her, and many's the time she's talked about having her revenge on her to me, and some weeks ago she made me give up a few things I had of Mrs. Norreys's in my possession, and put them to her own use."

And here Mrs. Wilson went into a lengthy descriptionof Mrs. Norreys's flirtations with Major Craven at Gibraltar, and the scandal appertaining thereto, and how the proofs of such intimacy, having been preserved by her, were delivered over to her false friend, and by her forwarded with an anonymous letter to her husband. "And I suppose that's what has made a quarrel between her and Mr. Norreys," she wound up with, "because I had orders to post the letters (there were two others for the Countess of Riversdale and Mrs. Craven) in London yesterday, and as I did not do so till very late, Mr. Norreys's would have reached the Abbey Lodge this afternoon. But it wasn't all my fault, Martha, indeed."

"Wasn't all your fault!" repeated Martha, contemptuously. "Mother, I'm disgusted with you. Wasn't your fault! when you gave up all the proofs that were to destroy the happiness of these people. What did you keep them for?" she added, turning fiercely round upon her. "Suppose she did flirt—woman like—I'd lay ten to one there was nothing wrong about it, and I'm sure no lady in the land loves her husband more than she does now. I've seen her watch for his return for hours, and when his step was heard, such a beautiful smile would come over her face. *She* love another man, or go wrong with another man! I don't believe it, mother. That's left for women like you and me."

It was a bitter thrust, and Caroline Wilson felt it to be so; but she had no appeal to make in her own defence, and was compelled to remain silent and conscience-stricken before her indignant child. When the silence was again broken, it was still Martha's voice that spoke.

"What did my mistress fetch from here?"

"A blotting-case, with the papers in it, on which Mrs. Arundel tried her hand before she wrote the anonymous letters. There are copies of them all in it. They will tell Mrs. Norreys from whom the letters came."

"I'm glad of it—I'm very glad of it!" exclaimed Martha. "Now the task will be easy. Mother, you must go with me to-morrow morning to Brighton."

"Martha, why? What do you mean? I cannot leave the cottage in Mrs. Arundel's absence."

"You must go with me to-morrow morning to Brighton," repeated her daughter, decisively, "in the same train with Mrs. Raymond if we can—*in the next one if* we cannot; and if Weybridge wasn't such a distance

from here, and the night so dark, I wouldn't rest till I had walked in there again, and told her so, and begged her pardon for the shameful part that you've taken in this business. But you shall beg it of her yourself to-morrow, mother?"

At this pleasant prospect, Mrs. Wilson having reseated herself at the supper-table, attempted another protest, to the effect that she couldn't leave Weybridge, and she couldn't meet Mrs. Norreys, &c., &c., but without gaining her point.

"Then I'll leave this house to-night," exclaimed Martha, rising as she spoke, "and you shall never see me more, mother. If you don't do as I say to-morrow, you must make up your mind to lose me again, for I swear to keep to my word. Now is it to be so or not?"

Then Mrs. Wilson, in her dread of losing her daughter again, and her certainty of losing her situation, promised that she would do as Martha desired, and accompany or follow Mrs. Norreys to Brighton, there to beg her pardon, confess the share she had taken in the transaction, and bear witness against Mrs. Arundel for the same.

"That's right," exclaimed Martha. "You said you'd cut off your right hand for her, you knew, and I don't ask quite so much as that. But this is only justice, and so much at least she deserves from you, mother. She's given you back your daughter, and you must give her back her husband, and the world's good opinion, and rid her of as false a friend as ever woman was cursed with. And perhaps when it's over you'll find that you've got the best of the bargain after all, for it's the only thing that could make me love you, and I believe my love's about the only thing you care to have."

And as Caroline Wilson saw the buxom form again dispose itself domestically beside her chair, she felt that the game before her was, for once in this world, worth the candle.

But October mornings are dark and cold, and by the time that Mrs. Wilson and her daughter had made the old woman understand that she was to stay at the cottage until their return, swallowed their breakfast, and walked into Weybridge, the seven o'clock train for Bishopstoke, into which poor sleepless Rachel, after hurriedly drinking a cup of coffee, had leapt, was already far on its way to that station, and all they had to do was to wait patiently for the next, which did not start till nine. And so Mrs. Raymond Norreys had been in Brighton for a couple of hours before their train rushed, panting, into the terminus, and disgorged them, to find their way as best they could to the house on the Marine Parade, where unsuspecting Mrs. Craven and her amiable and harmless friend had taken up their temporary quarters.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING.

The Marine Parade, at Brighton, is not the most pleasant residence in England for those who like retirement and shade. Brighton is not bearable, unless viewed from the luxurious seats of a well-hung carriage, with horses that carry you swiftly through everything that is unpleasant or inconvenient; but can never carry you away (run as they will) from the health-inspiring breeze, and the pure, fresh smell which everywhere pervades that cleanest, most unpicturesque, and yet most fashionable of watering-places. And of all months in the year, October is the most pleasant month for Brighton; the very season, although now verging on November, that Mrs. Craven had chosen to desert her home, and take a lodging there. She had usually sought the place before that time, but her visitors this year had deterred her; and when the strain, both mental and bodily, of entertaining them was lifted off, she had felt the immediate need of change. Her son had not intended to join her at the sea-side. He disliked Brighton, and none of his particular friends were there. But when his mother wrote, urging him to visit her for a day, and to bring her some things that she

needed from the Court, he did not like to refuse, particularly as the widow and her daughter were her guests. He was no less surprised than disgusted, when he heard that such was the fact, and that Mrs. Arundel had so little delicacy as to thrust herself in the way of meeting him again; but as it was the case, he did not care to put his mother, or himself, to inconvenience on her account. Besides, he was not averse to the idea of having an opportunity to treat her with the cool neglect that she deserved. And therefore, he had presented himself at the Marine Parade on the morning that the housekeeper had surmised he had gone there, and been persuaded by Mrs. Craven to pass the night in Brighton also.

But he had found the day drag wearily, and intended leaving for Aldershot on the following morning. That morning, when his mother, after waiting breakfast for him until nearly ten o'clock, and receiving the maid's assurance that she had "knocked repeatedly" at his door, went up herself to learn the cause of his extreme drowsiness, she found his room vacated, and no traces of him left; and all the light that the servant had to throw upon the matter was, that there "came a note for the gentleman a goodish bit past nine," and she took it up with his shaving-water, and put it inside the door; but she hadn't heard him go out since,—nor even come downstairs, nor yet, nobody,—and would Mrs. Craven please to have up the coffee and buttered toast at once.

Mrs. Craven wondered where on earth he could have gone to, and the widow simpered "that it was exceedingly strange;" but they waited for ten minutes more, and then decided upon having their breakfast without him; and it was well they did so, for the coffee and the toast and the other et ceteras of the well-furnished table would have been truly uneatable and undrinkable, had they waited until Major Craven's return. For he was sitting the while in the room of a quiet hotel a little way out of the town, clasping the hand of Rachel Norreys, and listening to the long and passionate story which fell from her excited lips.

"How glad I am that I stayed the night here! How very fortunate it is! I should never have forgiven myself otherwise," were the self-congratulatory phrases which kept ringing the changes upon one another, as Cecil heard what she had to tell him. And Rachel herself shuddered to think what she would have had to go through without his presence and protection, had she arrived only to find him gone.

She had asked some of the railway officials to direct her in the choice of some hotel, as soon as she had left the train; and thence she had written the brief note which had brought Cecil, fresh from his bed, to her side. His astonishment at seeing her alone was only equalled by what he felt, when he heard the reason she had to give him for her presence there. Rachel did not spare herself or him one iota of the whole narration. She repeated the words that had taken place between her husband and herself (all except that wild appeal of hers, which had been so roughly rejected by him), detailed the circumstances of her flight, and her subsequent discoveries at Laburnum Cottage.

"Look, here they are, Cecil," she said, producing the blotting-case and its contents for his inspection. "I have carried them in my hands the whole way. This is a copy of the letter that she sent to Raymond; these of those for Lady Riversdale and Mrs. Craven, I suppose. They are slightly different from his. I wonder your mother has not received hers this morning."

"It has gone to the Court, no doubt," he replied; "the widow is too cunning to have had it addressed here."

"And I imagined it was Caroline Wilson all the time. I never could have suspected Elise of such a base and cowardly trick. Oh, Cecil! what motive can she have possibly had?"

"I will tell you her motive, my dear," he responded. "I will blazon it out to all the world, since she will have it so." And then he told Rachel the story of his quondam love-making to the widow when he was but a boy, and her subsequent designs upon him.

"I was very young, Rachel, at the time," he concluded, "and all boys have their absurd fancies at that age; though heaven knows my youthful vision must have been unusually distorted. However, it was so, and it is

the fact of my engagement to Frances, that has put this Jezebel up to her revenge. But I will be revenged on her in return. So help me heaven!"

"Cecil! what are we to do?" asked Rachel, hurriedly.

"Do?" he rejoined shortly. "Why, I'll take you on my arm, Rachel, and march you up to the Marine Parade; and if, with our united evidence, and this bundle of papers, we cannot utterly confound Mrs. Arundel, and give her her orders to march, it will be a pity. She never darkens my mother's doors again."

"But, Cecil, dear Cecil!" said Rachel, in reply, "that will not mend matters, so far as you and I are concerned."

He was not so quick as she was, and had not viewed the matter in all its various lights. He had thought that the treachery of the widow once fully exposed, and herself turned out of the house, the difficulty before them would be grappled with, and settled. But her imagination went beyond his.

"Why not?" he asked.

"It will prove Eliza to have been a false friend and as false a woman, Cecil; but though she has been both to us, the facts related in these letters remain *facts*, and cannot be disputed. You never made love to me, nor I to you, but how are we to satisfy my husband, or your *fiancee*, of the truth of our assertion, whilst we are unable to tell them why such familiarities passed between us, and yet we still were blameless. That oath, Cecil, — that promise to my dying father, — it will be the ruin of us both."

"Good God!" was all he answered, as the truth of her assertion dawned upon his mind.

"We little thought, so careful as we were, that there was a spy upon our actions, Cecil, and an enemy within the camp; did we? We were simple enough to forget, knowing our perfect innocence, that appearances were so much against us, and that many a conviction takes place upon circumstantial evidence alone. But we have been foolish and imprudent, and the time has come when we must pay for our folly. But oh, Cecil!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "I am so sorry to think that I (to whom you have been so generous and so kind) should be the one to bring this blight upon your prospects; for I suppose it will prove the rupture of your engagement also."

"So be it," he replied. "If Frances cannot take me upon trust, she may go elsewhere for a husband. But it is I who should ask your pardon for soiling thus your pure, unblemished fame through my thoughtless imprudence and self-indulgence; and I so many years the oldest. Good heavens! I have much to answer for."

"You cannot be more to blame than I am," replied Rachel. "On knowing that our interests were mutual, we were both alike in the desire to show affection to each other; but, Cecil, there is *one* who could clear up all this cruel doubt by a single word, and make us happy again. Could we not ask it of her? Surely we have a claim, at least, to make such a request."

"Ask her, and what?" said Cecil, in a low voice; "to tell *what?* Rachel, you forget. I, for my part, would rather never own another friend, — would rather die, — than have it published to the world. And you? ——"

"I would rather die, also!" exclaimed Rachel, in a burst of grief. "Oh, how I wish to God that I had never been born!"

"We will be all the world to one another henceforth," said Cecil, raising her gently in his arms. "Rachel, I told you once that, if ever you wanted a home, you would find it with me. Let me redeem my promise now. Come and live with me, and let us try to make up to one another for this rupture in our lives, by the exercise of the affection which occasioned it."

"But what would people say?" whispered Rachel.

"Hang people!" was the emphatic, if ill-judged response.

"Ah! no," she said, shuddering to imagine herself sunk still lower than she was in the estimation of the man she loved, — "ah! no, dear Cecil, though thank you all the same for your generous offer; but it cannot, and it must not be. There is but one path open to you and to myself, — to live and pray that Heaven may send the means by which so foul a stigma may

be lifted off our heads; and, if it never comes, to die without having encountered further reproach, however unmerited. It will all be made right then. Cecil, when this life is over, Raymond will know my innocence, Lady Frances will acknowledge yours, and there will be no more disunion or misunderstanding between us, and, until that happens, we can only pray and hope ——"

"Against hope," he replied, fiercely, "for the remedy is worse than the disease. No, Rachel; there is one thing more to be done besides praying and hoping, and that is, to kick the widow Arundel out of my mother's house, — more practical and to the purpose certainly," he added, laughing, with a violent attempt to be merry, and disguise his feelings, "and very much to my taste. So, with your leave, I'll call a fly and take you to the Marine Parade. Whatever difficulties are in store for us in the future, this part of our duty has to do with the present, and is plain enough to my mind. Will you come at once, Rachel?"

"Yes. She had dried her tears and was ready to follow him; and, by the time the fly was at the door, her simple dress was re-arranged, and she stepped into it without hesitation, the blotting-case still fast held in her hands.

"You are not nervous, are you?" inquired Cecil, as they stopped at the number of the Marine Parade at which Mrs. Craven lodged.

"Not in the least," she said. "I am too angry and too indignant to be nervous. When I think of Eliza Arundel, and of finding myself in her presence, I feel like a war-horse scenting the battle."

And, as she stepped from the carriage and up the tedious flight of stairs, she carried herself with a proud bearing, conscious of right and impatient of wrong, that well suited the character of the comparison she had instituted for herself.

As the drawing-room door was flung open, discovering the two ladies still sitting over the uncleared breakfast-table, and Rachel entered, accompanied by Cecil Craven, his mother sprang to meet them with an exclamation of unbounded welcome and surprise; but Mrs. Arundel turned ashy-white, although she attempted an echo of her hostess's sentiments.

"My dear Rachel," said Mrs. Craven, "what an unexpected pleasure to see you here! Are your mother and sister-in-law in Brighton, or have you only come down with your husband?"

"I am perfectly alone, Mrs. Craven," said Rachel, firmly, "and am come upon very unpleasant business, I regret to say."

And then, as Mrs. Arundel approached her, with a Judas-like kiss, although the lips that she proffered for her acceptance were livid with a newly-awakened fear, she put her away with quiet decision.

"No, thank you, Eliza; not yet; not till you have heard the errand that brings me here this morning."

There was no appearance of a girl about her then. Her manners were so stately and lady-like — her words so cold and composed — that she might have been practising how to convict her friends of unexpected treachery, without compromising her own dignity, all the days of her life.

"Rachel! — Cecil! — what is all this about?" exclaimed Mrs. Craven. "My dear children, what is the matter?"

"Matter enough," said Cecil, "and disgrace enough, as you will acknowledge presently, mother; but Rachel has come all this distance for the pleasure of telling her own story, and so I will not disappoint her."

The pleasantry of Major Craven could not divert for one moment, the look of intense surprise which had crept over the face of Mrs. Craven — any more than the horror and amazement which were gradually becoming depicted in that of Mrs. Arundel — or the cool pride with which Rachel conducted herself throughout the whole proceeding.

"If Cecil wishes me to speak, I will," she said, "although he knows quite as much about it as I do. I need not ask you if you know these papers, Eliza," she continued, turning to that lady (for she could not at once divest herself of the habit of calling her by that familiar name).

Mrs. Arundel knew them well enough, as her agitated face denoted, but she gave a kind of sickly smile as she answered, —

"What papers, dear? This is my old blotting-book, I see, that I gave

some time ago to Caroline Wilson; but I really don't know anything about what papers may happen to be in it."

"Perhaps you don't know this one," replied Rachel, selecting and holding forth the sheet on which the signature of Eliza Arundel had been so often scribbled.

The widow turned very white as she recognized it, but attempted no further to pander with excuses in her own defence; and indeed her lips were trembling too much to allow her to speak. She saw her fate was marching down upon her, though she had yet to learn by what unhappy chance it had come.

"I will take a chair, if you will allow me, Mrs. Craven," said Rachel next, "for my story is a long one, and I am tired."

And then they all sat down. As Rachel proceeded with her recital, Mrs. Craven's eyes were fixed upon her face, whilst horror and shame, and a look very like despair passed over her own features. Cecil, a little apart from the others, kept his eyes sternly fixed upon the changing countenance of Mrs. Arundel; whilst she, convicted more forcibly by every word that issued from the mouth of her injured friend, kept quickly varying her impatient action from her foot to her head, from her head to her foot, whilst she vainly attempted to sit still, and appear at her ease.

Rachel spared herself no trouble in the telling. In just as much detail as Caroline Wilson had related it to Martha the night before, did she now tell the story of her friendship at Gibraltar with Major Craven and Mrs. Arundel; and only when she mentioned the first did she venture to send an appealing glance to the eyes fixed upon her own, as though she would say, "For *this*, is it possible that *you* can blame me?" And before her glance, whatever its intimation, Mrs. Craven's own eyes drooped, and her face flushed with the pain of listening.

"I have told you everything, Mrs. Craven," said Rachel, in conclusion, "as I am bound to do, considering that a letter similar to this will be forwarded to you to-morrow morning. I have no defence to make relative to my behavior with Major Craven. In my own heart I know no defence is needed, for we were dear friends, and nothing more; but I came here to-day to convict that woman of her deceit and treachery towards myself and Cecil, and to ask you, after hearing this, if you will make more of a friend of her than I shall."

"Mrs. Arundel, is what you have heard true?" demanded Mrs. Craven, rising from her chair, and slowly addressing the widow.

"I suppose it would be no earthly use my saying it is *not* true," nervously giggled that lady, "when two people whom you think so much of as Mrs. Norreys and Major Craven, are resolved to have it otherwise, else I might have asked them for their proofs that these papers were written by my hand?"

"The proof of your own signature," shouted Cecil. "What better one is needed?"

"May not some one have been sufficiently interested in this affair to forge my signature," she asked, "and practice forging it? What motive should I have in making so much mischief?"

But before the words were well out of her mouth, Mrs. Arundel was conscious that in them she had made a great mistake, and bit her lips to know it.

"What motive, Mrs. Arundel?" demanded Cecil, striding up to her, and looking her well in the face. "Do you wish me to tell my part of this story? It is not a pleasant episode in one's life to have to relate before one's mother; but, if necessary, I will not shrink even from that."

But *she* shrank from it visibly, and the first consciousness of shame which seemed to have assailed her, mounted to her forehead.

"I see it will *not* be necessary," he continued. "You will own these papers as your writing, without forcing us both to go through such an ordeal?"

But Mrs. Arundel had no time to answer this appeal before the door was again thrown open, and the maid announced "two *ladies*" for Mrs. Craven, and Martha and her mother stood before them.

Caroline Wilson looked almost as confounded as Mrs. Arundel, but Martha bore more the appearance of a young lion than anything else as pushed her way into the centre of the group.

"Martha, *you* here! exclaimed Rachel, in unfeigned surprise.

"Yes, please, ma'm," replied Martha, in a violent hurry, and without any stops. "I followed you to Weybridge last night, and I arrived at the Cottage just when you had left it, and heard all about the blotting-book, and the shameful tricks that have been played you from my mother here; and if you please, ma'am, I have brought her down to Brighton to-day as a witness against them as did it, and to humbly beg your pardon, ma'am, for her share in the business. And now, mother," she added, giving her maternal ancestor a good shove, "the sooner you get it over the easier you'll feel in your mind, and that I can tell you."

But Caroline Wilson was not nearly so energetic as her daughter would have had her be.

"I am very sorry, ma'am," she said in a cringing, sneaking kind of tone as she was forced to confront Rachel, "for the turn things have taken, and I beg your pardon, I'm sure. I wish I had never given Mrs. Arundel up the stud, nor the notes, nor anything, but she did so coax and persuade, and threaten and abuse me, that sometimes I didn't know if I was standing on my head or my heels, and put out, as I was, too, about my Martha here."

"What, woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Arundel, coming forward, "do you mean to lay all the blame of your own malicious revenge upon me, when you know you have had a spite against Mrs. Norreys for months past?"

Caroline Wilson did not mind being told she was malicious and revengeful half so much as being called a "woman," which is gall and wormwood to such as have least claim to the title.

"*Woman*, indeed!" she exclaimed, that famous "rough side" to her tongue turning uppermost. Woman yourself, Mrs. Arundel, if you please. Do you mean to deny that you wrote all those three letters, and left them with me to post in London during your absence, and that you gave me a five-pound note before you could coax me to give up that stud of Major Craven's, and the bits of paper? Woman, indeed! You're a nice person to call me a woman, when the whole regiment knows as well as can be that you were sweet upon Major Craven long before your own husband died, more shame to you! and 'twas in revenge for him taking no notice of you lately, that you went and wrote those letters. *Woman*, indeed! I should like to know who's a woman if you're not a woman!"

"Go on, mother; give her more," whispered Martha, delighted at Mrs. Wilson's eloquence.

But here Cecil interposed. With all his utter contempt for the widow's conduct, he could not hear a lady insulted in his hearing, and remain silent.

"Mrs. Wilson, you will oblige me by holding your tongue," he said authoritatively. "What we want is, not your abuse, but your evidence. You are ready to affirm that Mrs. Arundel wrote the letters that you posted?"

"Ready to swear to it, sir, and the reason why she wrote them also."

"That is nothing to the purpose," he replied. "Mrs. Arundel, do you deny it any longer, in the face of this witness?"

"I shall leave the house," said Mrs. Arundel, with an air of offended displeasure. "I thought I was amongst gentle people; but it seems I was mistaken. I shall not stay here to answer any more questions, put with the sole intent of directly insulting me." And she tried to gain the door as she spoke.

"Not so fast, Mrs. Arundel, if you please," now interposed Mrs. Craven. "I shall make no objection to your passing that door, never to recross threshold of mine, when you have first satisfied me upon one or two points. Of the personal share you have taken in this matter, and your reasons for so acting, I disclaim to question you. I am already sufficiently convinced of the amount and evidence of both, but I cannot let you go from here, free to circulate your own version of this unhappy matter amongst your friends and mine, or leaving behind you no proof that what I am convinced of is the truth. Others, besides Rachel Norreys and my son, will be sufferers through your malice. I must have a statement in your own handwriting to show to Lady Riversdale, and any others whom it may concern, that when we say you were the author of these cruel slanders, we speak no falsehood."

Mrs. Arundel now attempted to put on a show of great bravado.

"Oh! I can have no objection in the world," she said, "to confess that I wrote the letters. That is very easily done; and, after all, I only wrote what I know to have been the case. *Your* task will be a more difficult one to prove them to be slanders."

But Mrs. Craven would parley no more than was necessary with her. With her usual quickness she wrote out a brief but complete confession of the authorship of the three anonymous letters, and handed it for signature to the widow; and Eliza Arundel wrote her name beneath it with as great an affectation of not caring about the matter, as if she had been affixing it to a marriage settlement or a deed of gift. And then she raised her eyes, and said, addressing Caroline Wilson,—

"Do you return to my service?"

"No, ma'am, never," was the answer, firmly given.

"Well, you won't get any wages, then," the widow briefly and almost lightly answered, and making a sweeping courtesy, which included the whole room, she added,—

"A very good morning to every one present, and you have my sincere wishes, Mrs. Craven, that this very unpleasant business may be as speedily cleared up as is consistent with possibility."

And then she sailed up the stairs, still trembling, still livid, but resolved to maintain an air of defiance to the last, and they saw no more of her until her box was heard being carried down to the hall-door, and Cecil, looking from the window, announced that the widow and her belongings were actually in a fly, and about to take their departure.

"And now we are rid of her altogether, thank heaven!" he exclaimed. "Rachel, we should bless the anonymous letters for that, if for nothing else."

But the mournful look in Rachel's eyes recalled him to himself, and stayed his jocularity. The Wilsons had been dismissed before this to make their own arrangements, Martha having expressed her determination to stay with her mistress, and Caroline to return to her husband at Aldershot Barracks, and the three friends were alone.

"I can never bless them," Rachel said, sadly.

"My dearest child, you will surely return to your husband?" said Mrs. Craven, anxiously.

"To Raymond? How *can* I?" replied Rachel. "He believes me guilty; and how can I clear myself?"

Mrs. Craven looked nervously from Cecil to Rachel, and from Rachel to Cecil, and then she ejaculated, faintly,—

"Children, what bred this fatal intimacy between you?"

They glanced at one another, and were silent, she still gazing at them as if she would wrest the truth from their very eyes.

"Mother," said Cecil, suddenly, and turning towards her, "it is impossible for us to tell you *why*; but perhaps you may guess. We had a good reason for being thus familiar with each other. Would to heaven that we never had been, that we had remained as strangers to this moment! But, mother," he continued, kneeling beside her chair, "if there is any knowledge in your heart this day why it was and why it should be so, and if you value my happiness and the happiness of the daughter of your old friend more than that knowledge, for God's sake speak, and clear our names,—your name, mother, and mine,—if not before the world, at least to those whom it immediately concerns, to know us innocent. If there are motherly feelings springing in your bosom at this moment as you see our distress, and something whispers in your soul that you could heal our trouble if you chose, listen to that prompting, even though it lead to the humbling of a pride more powerful than itself. We are all weak at times, all foolish, and all faulty, but never so weak, so foolish, or so wrong, as when we suffer others to take the consequence of our evil-doing on their guiltless heads, and bear the blow, if not the blame. Mother, I could not bear to know you thus. I would rather see you dead. I would rather die myself than not believe you to be all that is most generous and motherly and noble. Surely a public——"

"*Hush! hush, Cecil!* you mistake; you quite mistake," interrupted his

mother, nervously. "Give me a little time first. At present let us speak of other things. Rachel, your husband must be written to."

"To what purpose?" she asked, wearily.

"To let him know where you are, and how far for truth these letters are to be depended on. Stay; it will be a painfnl task for you, my dear. *I* will write to him myself, and tell him that for the present, knowing you to be as innocent in the matter as himself, I shall retain you as my guest. And now, dear child, let me show you to a room, and call your faithful Martha to help you to undress, for you must be in sore need of rest and sleep." And then when she had done as she had proposed, and was about to leave Rachel to herself, she bent and kissed her, saying, "Don't think more hardly, dear child, of — of any one than you can help. In God's good time all this misery may come right again." And Rachel had drawn her face down to her own, and whispered to her that whatever happened, she would have her blessing, if no other's, till she died.

"Cecil," said Mrs. Craven, re-entering the drawing-room, the tears still lingering in her eyes which Rachel's words had called there. "Cecil, I have suspected it before, and now I feel convinced, that you and Rachel know what I thought was a secret locked up in my own breast. Don't speak, my son, to-day, or acknowledge it, because I feel I cannot enter into details; only tell me why have neither of you ever mentioned what you knew?"

"Because, we were bound by an oath never to moot the subject to a living creature."

"And by ——"

"Dr. Browne; he babbled it in his delirium."

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed his mother, burying her face in her hands.

"Dearest mother," said Cecil, softly drawing near to her, "you will not let her suffer for it, will you? You will not make us all miserable? You can see now what a fearful predicament we are in. Without you we have no means of escape. I loved her; I tried to be kind to her, and this is the end of it, — the destruction of all our happiness."

"No, no, Cecil! that shall never be!" replied his mother; "but give me time; only give me time; I cannot act alone. I must have advice. Cousin Gus will be here in a few days, and then I will tell you further; but not now — not now."

"Cousin Gus!" ejaculated Cecil; "what on earth has he to do with it?"

"Only wait a little while, only wait, Cecil, until Cousin Gus arrives."

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT OF IT AT ABBEY LODGE.

Christine Norreys, returning with her mother from her afternoon drive, on that particular evening which had seen Rachel fly from the shelter of the Abbey Lodge, was more than usually impatient to rejoin her sister-in-law. For there had been a talk of Raymond taking them to some entertainment at no distant date, and the (to women) all-important subjects of dresses and trimmings had, in consequence, been brought under consideration, and Christine, being more interested in the matter than Rachel, had been trusted to make the needful selections, and was anxious to know if they would entirely meet with the sanction of her sister-in-law. And so, having passed that hurrying figure in the fog, without further recognition of its individuality, and reached the Abbey Lodge, Christine sprung up the hall steps and the bed-room staircase, calling upon Rachel as she went. She burst without ceremony into the room which the latter occupied, and vexed at not finding her there, down she darted into the hall, which Mrs. Norreys had, by that time, slowly gained.

"Where is Rachel, mamma?"

"*My dear* Christine," replied her mother, in her matter-of-fact voice, "*how very much* more reasonable it would be if you would first think of

removing those heavy wrappings before you heat yourself by running up and down stairs. Not even your furs off—how very, *very* thoughtless of you, my dear."

"But I want to speak to Rachel, mamma, and show her this ribbon. I shall have to write to Madame Elise this evening, you know."

"Your sister-in-law is doubtless in the drawing-room or the dining-room, my dear, since she is not up-stairs."

But impetuous Christine by this time had thrown both doors open, and discovered both rooms empty.

"No, she is not, mamma," she said, advancing to the hall-door, and peering into the darkness. "Where is that stupid old Benson? Of course, standing chattering with the coachman. Benson!"

The old servant heard the fresh ringing voice of his young mistress, and closing the iron gate hastened to receive her commands.

"Benson! where is Mrs. Raymond?" exclaimed Christine.

"Mrs. Raymond, miss? I don't know, I'm sure, miss. Mr. and Mrs. Raymond Norreys were both in the dining-room about an hour or so ago, but I have not seen them since. I thought they were up-stairs, miss."

"Where *can* she be, mamma?" inquired Christine of her mother, almost fretfully.

"Are you sure you have thoroughly searched the up-stairs rooms, my dear?" was the placid rejoinder.

"Quite sure; but I'll look again;" and she bounded to the upper floor for the second time, followed by Mrs. Norreys. There they found their dressing-room fires lighted, and their lady's-maid in waiting, but no Raymond—no Rachel—not even any news of them.

"I'm sure for my part I haven't as much as set eyes on Mr. Norreys, nor yet on Mrs. Norreys, for the whole day," was her reply to the eager questioning put to her, "and can't say whether they went out or not."

"Ring for Martha," suggested Christine.

"Mrs. Raymond's maid is *out*, miss," was the prim reply, made with very compressed lips, and the general air of proceeding from an injured individual.

"They must have gone out themselves, mamma," at last concluded Christine, "and we shall not see them before dinner; and it must be nearly time for that now, so I will go and dress."

"A very strange proceeding, or so it appears to me," remarked her mother, "that Raymond should take Rachel out at this hour, and when she had already refused to accompany us for our drive—very strange and very unprecedented! but I suppose your brother knows what he is about; but a drive in a hackney cab, full of draughts (for he never *could* have been so mad as to take her out walking), is what I call anything but prudent at this time of the year, for a delicate creature like Rachel."

"Oh! she will not come to any harm, mamma, depend upon it. I only hope she may be here before the post goes out, or I shall have to decide about those trimmings all by myself;" and Christine, more vexed than alarmed, vanished into her own room.

But the second dinner-bell rang, and the solemn Benson had announced that meal to be on table, and still the missing husband and wife had not returned.

"Shall we wait for them?" was the question that both mother and daughter simultaneously put to one another, but were each unable to decide.

A stricter catechism through Benson, of all the servants, resulted that no one knew anything about the movements of either Mr. or Mrs. Norreys, so the ladies resolved to sit down to their dinner without them. But it was a dull meal, rendered still duller by their uncertainty.

"Depend upon it," said Christine, determined to make light of the matter, "that Raymond came home unexpectedly with tickets for the play, or something of that sort, and we were so late that they could not wait for us. He has often said that he would take us both there; but I shall give them a good scolding when they return, for daring to go without me."

"But in that case, my dear, surely your brother or sister would have left a note to inform us of the fact," suggested Mrs. Norreys.

"*Too much* hurried, perhaps," said Christine, shrugging her shoulders.

"and after all it is very tiresome to be forever obliged to account for one's actions in this world."

"Not when you are staying in another person's house, Christine," returned Mrs. Norreys with one of her most proper expressions. "A lady can never show too much deference to the established rules of the house she is residing in, nor to the wishes of its mistress. Politeness and punctuality cost little, and are the mainsprings by which the quiet and peace of a well-ordered household are maintained."

In the course of time, ten o'clock and prayers arrived, and then as the line of domestics filed into the dining-room to listen to the discourse which Mrs. Norreys read to them every evening, their mistress perceived that Martha Green was not amongst them.

"Where is Mrs. Raymond's maid?" she inquired, before she commenced reading.

"Not *hin* yet, ma'am," was the ready answer, triumphantly but acidly delivered by the lady's-maid who *was* "*hin*."

Mrs. Norreys slowly shook her head as she adjusted her spectacles, and the prayers proceeded and were concluded without her.

"Benson, turn off the gas," were Mrs. Norreys's words — delivered, according to her usual custom, as soon as the servants had left the room again.

"Oh, mamma! do wait till they come in," pleaded Christine; "it is half-past ten now, and none of the theatres are open after eleven. They will want some supper, too, on their return."

"My dear Christine," replied her mother, "your brother and sister know the regulations of the Lodge as well as I do. If they choose to transgress them, they must suffer the penalty. The supper-tray was on the table for half an hour, and the time that it is served, as well as the hours for prayers and bed, are familiar both to Raymond and Rachel, therefore there can be no necessity for delay on their account. Turn off the gas, Benson." And consequently the gas was turned off, and the servants retired to their beds, wondering if anything was the matter, and what could have become of the young master and his wife.

Mrs. Norreys immediately betook herself to her own room.

She was an excellent woman and mother, but the rules of her establishment had been infringed without notice given, and the offence, in her eyes, was not a light one; so often, too, as she had made her mind known upon the subject.

Christine, with no desire or notion of retiring to rest, remained in her room fully robed, but without occupation, as she listened anxiously for her brother and sister's return.

It came at last. When she had been thus kept expectant for about an hour, she heard the magic latch-key's welcome sound, crying "open sesame," first to the garden-gate, and then to the hall-door; and as the latter obeyed its command, she sprang, candle in hand, down the staircase, the better to welcome her sister into the inhospitable-looking and darkened hall. But when she reached it, she only saw Raymond; his latch-key had in some manner caught in the lock, and as he was attempting to extricate it by violence, he did not appear to be in the best of humors.

"Raymond!" said Christine, alarmed at not seeing her sister-in-law, "where is Rachel?"

"How should I know?" he answered, roughly; "in her room, I suppose. I have not seen her since this afternoon."

"She is not, then," replied Christine quickly, and now thoroughly frightened to find her brother was no wiser than themselves upon the subject. "Rachel was not at home when we returned at six o'clock, Raymond; and she has never been home since, nor more has Martha; we thought, of course, she had gone out with you. Where can she be?"

Her brother had turned his face towards her as she spoke, and Christine now saw that it was very pale, and that his eyes were bloodshot. And when he answered her, his voice was harsh and rough, and quite unlike his usual gentle tones.

"*What do you say?*" he exclaimed, grasping her arm in his surprise, — *chel not in the house*, — not been home to-night! What does it mean, *tine? where has she gone to?*"

"That is the question I asked you," returned his sister; "how can we tell? but come up-stairs to mamma, Raymond, and do not look so wild, because you frighten me." And the hand which grasped her arm was trembling almost as much as her own, as he mechanically obeyed her request and followed her to their mother's room. When he reached it, he flung himself into a chair, but did not speak.

"Mamma," said Christine, whose face was white as ashes, but whose heart was stronger at that moment than her brother's; "mamma, don't be alarmed, but there is some mistake here, we have both been mistaken; Raymond — that is, Rachel — has not been with Raymond, and he has not seen her since this afternoon; but it will all come right, mamma, it is sure to come right; pray don't look so terrified; there is Raymond to be comforted, — think of that."

Ay! think of that, noble women, in your first distress and horror, — think that there is a *man* requiring help and comfort, and put aside your own fears, your foolish fancies and nervousness, and rise up strong to succor in the time of need.

The face of old Mrs. Norreys grew calm again at her daughter's appeal; her trembling limbs steadied themselves, and she rose from her chair, and approached that whereon her son had thrown himself, burying his face in the arms which he had laid across its back.

"Raymond, my dearest boy," she said, trying in vain to hide the quivering in her voice, "you mustn't give way like this; it is very unaccountable and alarming, but only because we are kept in ignorance of its cause. It may be attributable to a mistake, or an accident, or thoughtlessness, that dear Rachel has been forced to pass a night away from her home; but depend upon it, we shall see or hear of her with to-morrow's sun, and she will be very careful, I am sure, in future, not to give us such a fright again. There can be nothing wrong, my dear; take comfort — it is too soon to fret about it — we shall hear everything to-morrow."

And then Christine's sweet, coaxing voice was heard.

"Raymond, dear, what is it after all — only a matter of a few hours since she was down here, well and happy. Nothing very bad can have occurred in so short a time. She may have gone out, intending to return to dinner or soon after, and forgot the time, or missed her opportunity, or — oh! a thousand chances might turn up to detain her that we have no imagination of, nor shall have, till she tells us of them herself. But, in the mean while, she has Martha with her, and therefore she is not alone, which is one great comfort."

"Is Martha missing, also?" inquired Raymond, still in the same harsh voice, lifting his head for a moment from the shelter of his arms.

"Yes, and has been for as long a time as Rachel; and therefore I think they must have gone, and will certainly return, together. Don't be frightened about her, dear Raymond; it will all be right to-morrow."

"It will *not*," he answered, rising from his seat, and almost pushing away the gentle arms which love had laid about him. "You neither of you know as much as I do about the matter, or you would not talk such folly."

"Raymond, what do you know?" exclaimed Mrs. Norreys, with inconceivable terror in her voice.

"Mother," he said, turning towards her, "you should never have heard it from my lips as long as concealment was possible; but I see now, by her flight, that Rachel intends it to be known. She is under a terrible suspicion, mother, and her present conduct makes it look very like a certainty."

And then he related how he had received the anonymous letters that afternoon, and the particulars of his subsequent interviews with Rachel. He did not make any comment upon his story; he brought forward no opinions of his own, and deduced no inferences for their enlightenment; he simply told the facts, and nothing more; but throughout his narrative he never used the term "my wife," or spoke once as if he thought Rachel's fair fame would ever be re-established in his eyes. Christine listened, with the pitying tears standing in her own; but his mother's face grew sterner with every word he uttered. This was a disgrace she had never dreamt of, as liable to spring from the hasty and ill-judged marriage of her son. This was a blot that had never been known before to rest upon the wife of

Norreys; and with her starched ideas and unspotted name, the mother of Raymond was the very last woman in the world, on any pretence, to pity or excuse it.

As he finished his narrative, and glanced towards her face, now stony and unsympathetic, he saw there that she had completely locked up her heart, and steeled it against any soft or generous doubts which might arise about the truth of the case (however much appearances were against Rachel); and he resolved that, having told so much — discharged a stern but necessary duty — he would trouble her with no surmises of his own; no possible excuses for the absent; no appeals to her woman's heart to pity so much youth and tenderness and beauty, laid low and dishonored in the view of a harsh, ill-judging world. No! he had told his tale of misery — his mother might think Rachel what she would, but, hardly as he thought of her himself, he could not stay to hear reproaches heaped upon her now; and so, with the conclusion of his narrative, he left the room.

"That is all I know," he said as he did so. "I received the letters, and she could not deny them, and I do not expect now ever to know much more. She intended, probably, by her subsequent disappearance, to tell me what she had not the courage to confess. But deeply as I feel all this I am too great a coward, mother, to hear your comments on her history, or commiserations for my loss; and the greatest kindness you can show me from this hour is to forbear from all allusion to my misery or myself."

And then, before another word had passed between them, he was gone.

Mrs. Norreys gazed at Christine in rigid silence as Raymond left them, and Christine gazed upon her mother, but neither spoke. At last the older lady said, in tones of mixed solemnity and grief, —

"This is, indeed, a heavy judgment on us. We have often been unfortunate before, in the world's opinion, but never guilty — never guilty."

"Mamma," said Christine, indignantly, "you do not mean to say that you believe my sister to be really culpable in this business?"

"Do not call her *your* sister, Christine, I implore you," returned her mother; "she is no sister of yours, thank God! Guilty! Why what does her own husband think about her?"

"He loves her, and is blinded by his love and by his fears," replied Christine; "besides he is a man, and cannot understand a woman as a woman can. I know there are plenty of guilty wives, mamma, walking this world and undiscovered; but they do not go about like Rachel — not with the same honest, unflinching eyes; the same straightforward, outspoken tongues — not with such courageous hearts, mamma, fearless of detection and unconscious even of being suspected. No! I never will believe it! Until she tells me so with her own lips, I never will believe that she is less innocent than I am, of this offence or any other."

"My dear Christine," replied her mother, "your championship does credit to your own warm heart, but you are prejudiced, my love, in this unhappy girl's favor, and cannot be considered an impartial judge. You heard what your brother said. Her own silence at once condemned her; it did not require her subsequent flight to convince poor Raymond of the fatal truth. It is an awful blow — I scarcely know yet what to think or do. I feel as if it was too fearful a thing even to command belief."

"I don't *feel* — I *know*," rejoined Christine, stoutly. "Mamma, if Rachel is what you think her, never have faith in your own sex again."

And then Mrs. Norreys tried to set the fallacy of such an argument before her daughter's eyes; to direct her attention to the object such anonymous letters could have in view, excepting that of doing a prudent, if not a kind action; but with all her sophistries, Christine's cry continued to be the same.

"What you say may be true in other cases, but in this I don't believe it, and I *won't* believe it. Rachel is as pure as I am;" and in the same belief she left her to retire to her own room.

But not just yet — not till she had crept to her brother's dressing-room; and, having ascertained that he was still up, had softly opened the door, and as softly entered. Not until she had seen Raymond leaning in a dejected attitude against the table, his head upon his hands, his gaze directed into vacancy, and having seen him thus, had closed the door behind her, and going up to him, taken that weary head between her kindly hands,

and pressed on it a shower of soft womanly caresses, that told him more than words could have the power to do.

"Dearest Raymond," she whispered; "my own dear brother, I do not believe it. I could stake my life to-night upon her innocence, — my earthly happiness upon her love for you. For I have seen further, being a woman, than you perhaps have ever done; and I feel to Rachel as I should have felt towards a sister of my very own. I don't believe a word of it, dear Raymond; upon my honor I do not."

In her firm trust in the goodness of her brother's wife, and in her own youthful ignorance of the darker shades of guilt, Christine had no idea but that Raymond believed as she did, and sorrowed most because others would not credit Rachel with the virtue that he did himself. He had passed no comments on his tale whilst telling it; he had only related facts. It never struck his sister that he could really think the woman whom he loved so much had been so cruelly false to him, and so crafty in the concealment of her guilt. But although Raymond, with a man's lesser powers of credulity, where his jealousy has been so roughly roused, and his honor is at stake, could not respond to his sister's appeal, or say he also relied on Rachel's innocence, he yet could hear the sweet, soft womanly accents, pleading so unconsciously for his absent wife, — for the woman he so passionately loved, and who he had often wished that day he had seen lie dead at his feet before he had lived to know her false to him. As the endearing accents of Christine reached his ears, and, through them, the inmost recesses of his heart, the barriers of his pride and attempted hardness broke down before them, and Raymond Norreys sobbed as he had never sobbed, — as men never sob, except the iron from a woman's hand has entered in their souls, — as but *one* woman in the world has power to thrust it in the soul of any one man.

"Oh! Christine," cried Raymond Norreys, clinging to his sister as if he were the weaker vessel, and her tender womanhood the rock to which he looked for safety, "I have loved her from such a very child; I have thought upon and remembered her through so many weary years of expectation; I have tried to be so forbearing and so tender with her since we met, — and has it been for this? Have I loved her for this only? to break my heart at last? God knows how faithful I have been to her! I never saw the woman except Rachel, who cost me a thought, and now the thought of her will blast her memory to my dying day. Oh, sister! I wish that I had died before I knew it; I wish I could have seen her dead, and remembered and mourned her only for her perished youth and loveliness; before I had lived to think upon what she has been, — upon what she might have been (had I never crossed her path and put a check upon her inclinations), and then waked up, only to remember what my darling has become, — to what her fatal vow to me has led her." And far into the silence of that night nothing else was heard except the convulsive sobs which broke unrestrainedly from Raymond's breast, and the labored, painful beating of the faithful heart he leaned on

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE LAST OF TOM WHITE.

But the next morning all seemed changed. The day broke sadly enough for the whole Norreys family, for none of them had had any rest, and they met at the breakfast-table with a half-guilty consciousness that each one was responsible for the restraint which sat upon the whole party; and that it behooved somebody to take the initiative, and broach the painful subject which occupied their hearts. And yet neither had the courage to do so. The servants appeared at prayers, with an evident understanding between them that something had gone wrong respecting Mrs. Raymond Norreys, and cast many furtive and curious glances, in consequence, at the ladies of the family (Raymond not having put in an appearance) during the reading

of the morning lecture. And though they left the room no wiser than they had entered it, the scrutiny had not passed unobserved by the mother and daughter.

"My dear, this will never do," was Mrs. Norreys's remark to Christine, as soon as they were alone again; "the servants must have *some* reason given them for Mrs. Raymond's absence, or they will put the very worst construction on this unfortunate affair."

"Very true, mamma," replied Christine; "perhaps you had better consult Raymond about it when he comes down."

But this consulting of Raymond was by no means an easy matter, for when he appeared, haggard from the sleepless night he had passed, he seemed scrupulously to avoid the subject of Rachel, do what they would to lead the conversation in that direction. There were no traces left of that softened mood in him, to which Christine had been witness the night before — although it was evident that he had not forgotten it, from the trouble he took to elude meeting the glances of sympathy which she directed towards him. His sister fancied that he felt ashamed of having given way to tears before her; she had already determined that no one but herself should ever know of it, and she now resolved that, if possible, she would lead Raymond to believe that even she had forgotten the circumstance. But all her gentle endeavors failed to put him at his ease; for he was restless, and unmistakably anxious to avoid notice, and when his mother casually addressed him, his answers were given in the same rough, harsh voice that had characterized his speech of the night before. Still it was impossible that utter silence could be maintained between them on the subject of his wife, and therefore, after breakfast, when his mother saw that he was making preparations to leave the house, she drew him into the drawing-room, and closing the door, put the direct question to him, —

"Raymond, you must tell me one thing before you go. What do you intend to do about your wife?"

"What *can* I do?" he rejoined, curtly; "she has left no traces of her destination."

"I was scarcely alluding to your following her," replied Mrs. Norreys, "because I think it very unlikely that we shall not receive any intimation of, or from her, to-day — but with respect to my servants, it must seem very strange to them."

"Oh! hang your servants;" exclaimed Raymond, seizing his hat, and making a rush for the hall door. "What do *I* care, whether they think it strange or not?" And more excited than she had ever seen him before, her son left the Abbey Lodge, slamming the door after him as he went.

"I think your brother's grief must have driven him half wild," Mrs. Norreys said to Christine; "he used the most ungentlemanly language with regard to the servants, and slammed the door right in my face."

"How you can worry the poor fellow about servants at such a time, I can't imagine," returned Christine; "it's enough to make him impatient, when he has much more important things to think of. Tell me what you want, mamma, and I will settle it for you." And then the difficulty of satisfying the servants' curiosity with regard to her sister-in-law's movements, without too severely compromising the character of the latter, was confided by the mother to her clearer-headed daughter, and a remedy soon found by the latter.

"Why, mamma, it's the easiest thing in the world; we must pretend to have heard this morning — that is all. Leave it to me. I will make some casual remark to Elizabeth, and she will march down stairs immediately, and repeat it to all the others." And consequently, a few minutes afterwards, the said Elizabeth did enter the servants' hall, looking extremely disappointed, and said, "Law! it was nothing after all, for Miss Norreys had just said to her, as she was arranging the bedroom, 'What do you think, Elizabeth? Mrs. Raymond has played us such a trick — she ran off all of a sudden yesterday afternoon, to spend a few days with a friend, and left us to guess what had become of her until this morning. Wasn't that a shame? And poor mamma and I were so frightened till Mr. Raymond came home last night.' So you see," added the Abigail, "that there can't be *nothing wrong*, because Mr. Norreys knew all about it; but I call it a stupid

trick to play any one, that I do, raising a body's curiosity all for nothing—don't you?"

And the general opinion in the servants' hall was, that it was not only "stupid," but unpardonable to the last degree. And the only consolation they could extract, was from the old cook, "That if these was the kind of tricks the young missus was going to play upon her mother-in-law, there'd be a row worth listening to between them before long." The knotty point of the servants' satisfaction having been attended to, no other difficulties presented themselves for immediate grappling with, and the day passed wearily away as the post was eagerly watched for, in hopes that it might bring them news of the runaway. Christine and her mother enjoyed a very melancholy and almost silent drive together during the afternoon, for nothing short of death in the house would have induced Mrs. Norreys to lay aside that time-honored custom. But their son and brother did not reappear to bear them company; and Christine's bright eyes filled with tears every time they encountered Rachel's guitar, or her feet passed Rachel's empty room, and her heart wondered how long it would be before the mystery was cleared up. Even when the next morning, bringing Mrs. Craven's letter for Raymond, set aside their worst fears, and they knew that Rachel was in safety with her friend, matters did not appear in the way for amendment. Christine had, of course, all faith in the statement of Mrs. Craven; and, assured of her sister-in-law's well-doing, and the baseness of the writer of the anonymous letters, would have been ready to reassume her usual cheerfulness, if she had been encouraged to do so by her mother or her brother.

But neither Mrs. Norreys nor Raymond believed in Mrs. Craven's epistle; of course (so they argued) she would try to screen Rachel; it was her object to do so—were not her son and her son's fiancee both concerned in the removal of the imputation upon her fame? would they not both be heavy sufferers by the impracticability of such removal? of course Mrs. Craven was the very one who would defend and shelter Rachel Norreys, whatever her own conviction on the subject. And the discovery that Mrs. Arundel had been the writer of the anonymous letters, and the raker-up of the scandal, was no proof that the scandal was such, since the very person whom it most concerned had not a word to say in her own defence.

Raymond confessed that he had never quite liked, or trusted his wife's friend, from the beginning. He was glad that she had been shown up in her true colors; and since her motives in writing the letters about Rachel had most probably been simply spite that she had been turned out of the family by whom she had hitherto been made so welcome; but all this did not remove one stain from Rachel, one doubt respecting her from her husband's heart. She had admitted Cecil Craven to a culpable familiarity with herself, and God only knew the rest. For Raymond's part, he scarcely dared to think of it. He answered Mrs. Craven's letter very briefly—but with decision. He was obliged to her for receiving Mrs. Norreys into her house, but he could not see in what measure the arguments she had favored him with removed the unpleasant impression under which he had labored since receiving the anonymous letters. When Mrs. Norreys could herself deny the statements made therein he would be the first to disbelieve them.

He made no allusion to Rachel's returning to his protection, nor to his own distress at her absence; and Mrs. Craven, on receiving so cold and stern a reply, felt that her mission so far had failed, and that in order to restore these two people to mutual confidence but one thing remained to be done.

In the mean while Raymond threw her letter in the fire, and wished that he could throw all remembrance from him in like manner. But the more he wished, the more impracticable the deed appeared to grow. The image of Rachel, as a child, as a woman, in her tears, her merriment, her silence, and her passion, hovered before him, sleeping or waking, and kept him perpetually upon the rack. And he had hoped so much lately from her altered conduct to himself, and from the increasing love which she had manifested towards his mother and Christine. And now all his hopes were utterly and irrevocably ruined. He had sorely felt his sorry welcome home; he had fretted more than enough since then, but nothing could compare, in intensity, to the bitter disappointment, the baffled hopes, the tender feeling waiting upon outraged love, that Raymond Norreys experienced now.

And he was not good at bearing, without a murmur, an "undeserved lot." He was impatient under suffering,—fiercely so, at times, and ready to argue with his fate and curse it, when he could not prove his argument. And he tried to drown all this, as men (heedless of past failures) *will* try, in dissipation. Ah! those were sad hours for Raymond Norreys to look back upon, in after years—hours which he would have been happy to have been able to forget; but, during that evil time, chance (or so it seemed at first sight) threw in his way a motive for action, which, slight though it was, had the power to divert him from much that was wrong, and led eventually to a great and wonderful change in his fortunes. He was strolling late one night, or rather early one morning, into a cafe near the Haymarket, where he had been in the habit, lately, of meeting several wild spirits of his acquaintance, when he saw, to his surprise, that the shutters were already up, and, on entering by a private door, found that the whole place was in a state of the greatest confusion and disorder—chairs, benches and tables were upset—glass and china broken—liquor spilled about the floor, whilst a crowd of gamesters, both male and female, were hiding away in some of the private rooms, and the proprietor of the cafe was in perfect despair at the wreck around him.

"Why, what's been the row?" exclaimed Raymond, as he sauntered in and spied the general *melee*.

"Oh, Mr. Norreys!" replied the man, who knew my hero by name, and finding himself alone with him, ventured to pronounce it; "we've had the bluebottles in here, and my number's down for a fine, as sure as can be; all along of that bully, Lord —— (you know his name, sir, without my speaking it); and see the scrape he's got me in. However, I managed to get most of the lot smuggled into the lower billiard-room, and there they are, all locked up together; and I'm blest if they'll come out under an hour, for I'm convinced those bobbies are watching the house still, and will do so until they're tired."

"How did it happen?" inquired Raymond.

"As usual, sir, a row between two of them, and sides taken up. And I haven't told you the worst of it yet, for one of the gentlemen is so badly hurt about the head that I had him taken up to my wife's room, and she sent word just now that she thought we ought to send for a doctor; and I *shall* catch it hot, if that's necessary. By-the-by, sir," continued the proprietor, "you know the gent well enough by sight, and, now I come to think of it, he bears the same name as yourself; though," he added in a tone of confidence, "that isn't known to everybody, and I should wish it to be between ourselves."

"The same name as mine?" returned Raymond; "not spelt the same, though."

"Well, I don't know, sir, but if I'm not mistaken, I rather think it is—with a *y* and an *e*, sir; yes, I rather think so."

Raymond was just ruminating on the strangeness of the man's assertion, for he had believed their own family to be the only one spelling their name like himself, when a second messenger came to say "that the gentleman that was hurt was very bad indeed, and the mistress thought he was dying." Then the landlord's face grew pale at the idea of having a corpse in the house to account for, and a coroner's inquest sitting upon it; and he asked Raymond if he thought he ought to send for a doctor.

"Let us go and see him first," suggested Raymond, "the women may be mistaken;" and the landlord led the way up the dark staircase (for all the gas had been turned off at the approach of the policemen) to the site of his private apartments.

There, laid in a comfortably-enough furnished bedroom, and watched by a silken-dressed and ringletted woman, Raymond encountered, to his surprise, the scarcely-breathing form of the man who, under the name of Tom White, had taken the trouble to go out of his way in attempting the seduction of poor Martha Wilson. He had met him too often lately, and watched him too narrowly, to be mistaken in his identity, even though his face and head were smeared with blood, and a large bandage hid the greater portion of his features. He was laid upon the sofa, but he appeared perfectly nerveless, as he hung over the side of it, with eyes turned upwards and

mouth partially opened. The sight of him sobered poor Raymond completely.

"Good heavens!" he said, "he looks very bad; how long ago did it happen?"

"About two hours, sir," replied the woman, "and it's a dreadful cut—right across the back of his head—done with a bronze lampstand, one of the girls told me; but the hair is quite driven into the wound, so that I can't tell whether it's very deep or not."

"Has he spoken at all?" inquired Raymond.

"Not a word, sir," she replied; "and I think he had a kind of fit just now, for he stretched himself out, and worked about a good deal, but he didn't make the least sound."

"I think you should send for a doctor at once," said Raymond to the landlord; "the man is seriously hurt, if not dying. If he dies in your house without assistance, you will suffer for it."

"I will send immediately," replied the proprietor, seriously alarmed. "If you could stay here for a little, sir, you would greatly oblige me."

And Raymond, who felt a strange interest in the man, from the circumstance of his having been brought under his notice on the subject of Martha, readily promised compliance, and took his seat by the side of the sofa. He had forgotten what the landlord had said relative to his bearing the same name as himself. But when the doctor came, and, having examined the wound, pronounced it to be a very dangerous fracture of the skull, and the patient at that moment to be laboring under congestion of the brain in consequence, he turned to Raymond and asked if he had been in any way connected with the unfortunate affair.

"Not at all, I am happy to say," was his frank rejoinder. "I arrived long after it had happened, and am only here at the request of the landlord. Do you think he will recover?"

"Are you a relation of his?" was the return question.

"None, not even a friend. I have met the man occasionally before, but am ignorant of his very name."

"Then I may as well tell you—there is no chance for him. If his combatant could be traced, it would be a case of manslaughter. His friends should be communicated with."

"I don't know who they are," said Raymond.

"Have you searched his pockets?" demanded the medical man.

"Scarcely. It was no business of mine," he replied, shortly.

"Then I think, under the circumstances, I shall be justified in doing so, though I do not expect he will ever revive sufficiently to recognize any one again. We are about to look into this gentleman's pockets to see if we can discover who his friends are," he added to the landlord, who now re-entered.

"I can tell you his name, sir, and I'm sure I wish now I'd never heard it, for this is by no means the first scrape he's got me in, though I suppose it's likely to prove the last. He is a Mr. Norreys, same name as this gentleman here."

"It is not an uncommon name, said Raymond, still adhering to the notion that the stranger's patronymic must be spelt "Norris." But when the doctor had taken a whole packet of papers from the dying man's pockets, and was turning them over in his hands, he remarked, casually,—

"Spelt in this manner it *is* an uncommon name, sir—Norreys. We don't often meet it so, nowadays."

"Will you allow me to look at that envelope for a minute?" said Raymond, interested in the discussion, and when the doctor, complying with his request, passed the paper over to him, and the following address met his astonished eyes, he could scarcely believe for the moment that he saw correctly: "Archibald Norreys, Esq., 14*a*, Albany, London." But before he had time to express his surprise the doctor tossed him another.

"Very little doubt about this, sir," he remarked. "Here is an unposted letter, evidently intended for some relative of the patient's," and Raymond read: "To Sir Archibald Norreys, Bart., Woolcombe Rise, Berks." He remained so long gazing at the two envelopes, and lost in surprise at their superscription, that the doctor became impatient.

"Now, sir, there is no time for wool-gathering—we must go to business. Perhaps you find you *do* know this gentleman's friends, as you appear so interested in the addresses of his letters?"

"I told you, Mr. Norreys, the name was spelt the same," whispered the landlord, at the same moment reading the papers over his shoulder.

"I believe I do," he said, answering the doctor's remark alone. "What should be done next?"

"The next thing to be done is to communicate with his nearest relative, and since you seem to have some knowledge on the subject, I think you will be the best person to do so, if you will take the trouble."

"I do not mind the trouble," returned Raymond, "but I am not certain of this gentleman's identity. I suspect, however, that he is the son of this Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise."

"Whew!" whistled the doctor; "Sir Archibald must look out for another heir then, I am afraid."

"If I undertake to telegraph to him," replied Raymond, quietly, "what shall I say?"

The doctor's remark had stirred up new and strange thoughts in his breast, but with a heavy trouble weighing him down, they did not excite him so much as they might otherwise have done, and he remained, to all outward appearance, as unconcerned as he had been before they had been suggested to his mind.

"Simply that Mr. Norreys has sustained a fracture of the skull, and that if he wishes to see him alive he had better come to town at once. That is all that can be said, beside giving the address. It is no place for a gentleman to die in, and if he could be moved with any degree of safety I would have him taken to my own quarters, but his sole chance lies in perfect quiet. I shall stay with him myself, and if you will kindly see to the telegram being sent to Woolcombe Rise as early as possible, you will be doing him the best service you can."

"I will drive direct from here to the station," observed Raymond, in reply, "and the message shall be sent the first moment practicable. I shall look round here in the course of the morning, Mr. Barnett," he added, having ascertained the name of the practitioner, "so, until then, good day to you."

And full of thought, still more sad than that with which he had entered it, Raymond Norreys left the cafe again.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A TURN IN THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE.

It was a comfort to poor Raymond (melancholy as the subject was) to have "something to say" to his mother and sister, when he met them at breakfast that morning, that did not in the least refer to, or have any connection with, the unfortunate topic of his wife. As they had never been made acquainted with the episode of Mr. Tom White, or been told anything more with regard to Martha Wilson beyond the commonplace information that she had had "a young man," and, at the desire of her mistress, dismissed him, it was unnecessary to inform them further than that Raymond had met with a stranger, dangerously wounded in the manner described, and had accidentally discovered him to be their cousin Archibald Norreys, and the heir of Woolcombe Rise. They had never associated in any way, nor ever been recognized by their Berkshire relations, therefore the news had little effect upon Mrs. Norreys and Christine, beyond making them give vent to a great deal of surprise at the strangeness of the rencounter, and a good deal of pity for the dying young man," &c., &c. As to *where* Raymond had met his cousin and under what circumstances, my hero managed, by skilful fencing, perfectly to satisfy them without *compromising his* honor or himself; and the two women were unsuspecting of evil, and swallowed, in perfect faith, anything he chose to tell them.

They had been all so very sad before, that the melancholy recital had no power to increase the lowness of their spirits; indeed, it tended to work good, especially with Raymond, to whom it gave fresh ideas, and something to distract his mind from dwelling too much upon his great grief.

"I wonder by what train Sir Archibald will arrive," he said, as he prepared to leave again. "I suppose the first intimation he ever received that there is a Raymond Norreys in the world, was, when he saw my name upon the telegram. It will be a sad meeting between the father and son. I dare say he will have no time even to notice me."

"I dare say not, my dear," replied his mother, "and it would be little use if he did. The families have always been so very much separated. Unless, indeed," she added, lowering her voice, "the worst happens with his son; and then you have not forgotten, Raymond, that——"

"Oh! hush, mother," he replied, as if he were pained at the allusion. "My cousin may not die after all. Doctors are often mistaken; and if he does, Sir Archibald might marry again. Don't raise my hopes for nothing."

"Perhaps it is as well not to be premature," she rejoined. "But the baronet's marrying again is scarcely likely; he is an old man now. The poor young fellow who lies wounded must be older than yourself, Raymond."

"About the same age, I should think," he replied. "Had he any sisters?"

"No; the last Miss Norreys died two years ago. I should think this would be a great blow to poor Sir Archibald. Well! well! all our troubles seem coming together."

Raymond heaved a sigh, and left her. As soon as he arrived at the Haymarket cafe he was met by Mr. Barnett, the doctor, with two pieces of news.

"I regret to say it is all over, Mr. Norreys; he died at seven o'clock this morning, and here is an answer to your telegram to Sir Archibald (or I conclude so); it arrived but this moment."

Raymond was quite unprepared for either piece of intelligence, and he looked very grave as he opened the printed official envelope.

The words were few.

"From Sir A. Norreys, Bart., Berkshire, to R. Norreys, Esq., London.

"'Your message received. Shall be up by the noon train. Send some one to meet me at Waterloo Station.'"

"By noon?" exclaimed Raymond, examining his watch. "Why it is nearly that now. Will you meet Sir Archibald, and break the news to him?"

"Well, I think, Mr. Norreys," replied the practitioner, who did not like the idea of the job any more than Raymond did, "I think that my place is by the side of the corpse, until Sir Archibald gives orders for its removal—if *you* would not object, sir."

"I ought not to do so," replied Raymond, "for to tell you the truth, this gentleman was my cousin, although we have been so much separated as to be unknown to one another. I confess I shrink from having to carry such news to his father; but if you think it your duty to remain by the corpse——"

"Well, Mr. Norreys, it must be as you wish, of course," returned the doctor, whose opinion of Raymond had risen ten per cent. directly he heard that he was related to a baronet; "but I should think *you* were the fittest person to break the news to Sir Archibald."

"Well, well! I will do so," replied Raymond, hastily, "and had better be off at once, as the time is going fast. You will allow no one into the room to inspect the remains, if you please, till we return."

"Certainly not, sir; it is locked up, and I have the key in my pocket."

And then Raymond jumped into a hanson, and went about his melancholy business. And in this place, perhaps (since her name may never again be mentioned in connection with his), it will be as well to say, that poor Martha Wilson was never informed of the real name of her lover, nor of the cruel circumstances under which her master met him. Months afterwards, indeed, the news of his death was broken gently to her by Rachel; *but of all other truths* concerning him, she remained ignorant until her own

Raymond Norreys did not reach the Waterloo Station till some minutes past twelve, and was afraid at first that he would miss the train; but when he got there he found that it had not yet arrived, and the porters and guards were all on the platform in a state of expectancy. Another five minutes passed, and then Raymond stopped an official to ask him the reason of the delay.

"Can't say, sir," was the answer; "it often happens so with the country trains."

A jocose porter passed them at the moment, whistling.

"Well," he cried to the guard, "don't seem as though your pet Ascot was coming to time this morning! The 'Firefly's' bust—told you she would." And then the guard, who did not appear to relish a joke against his favorite engine, spoke to Raymond again, passing over the vulgarity of the porter with silent contempt.

"She's been very likely detained, sir, by some of the cross trains. That line's a regular bit of net-work. She can't be long now, though."

A quarter of an hour—twenty minutes—were gone; and still the Ascot train was due. A dozen trains had rushed panting into the terminus since Raymond had patrolled the platform, and yet the one he looked for came not.

"It was lucky," he thought at first, "as it gave him time to think over the approaching interview with the bereaved father; but as the minutes went on, other expectant friends became impatient, and he caught the infection. Two or three husbands who had come to meet their wives or families, an anxious mother who was expecting a little child from the country, whom she had not seen for long, and others who were pressed for time, and annoyed at being obliged thus to waste it.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Raymond, at last, "*is* the train coming this morning, or is she not? People cannot be hanging about all day in this manner."

The face of the guard whom he addressed had grown graver since he last saw it.

"We are afraid there must have been a stoppage somewhere, sir," he replied; "she's not used to be but a few minutes behind her time, but we shall hear presently, no doubt."

"I hope there's nothing wrong," said Raymond, and he thought at the same time what an aggravation it would be to poor Sir Archibald's distress to be compelled to delay upon the road.

"Wrong! bless you, no, sir!" replied the guard, in a tone of the extremest cheerfulness. "How should there be? We shall see her directly."

"If she don't make haste," observed another guard, "she'll run into the down train."

"She's been delayed," said the first speaker, with an air of certainty, "and is waiting for the down train to pass—that's it, to my mind."

And the various watchers, male and female, looked very much relieved by the tone of decision with which he pronounced these words.

Thirty minutes—forty minutes—past the hour of twelve. By this time there were more officials on the platform than those ordinarily seen there—men in plain clothes, and evidently of higher authority, kept passing on and off it, and communicating with the lower servants of the company. And at last a messenger came for the principal there, and he went into the telegraph office, and somebody in the anxious crowd conjectured that news of the missing train had arrived. Raymond's curiosity had been raised by this time, and he appeared as eager as the rest for intelligence of some sort. They all pushed forward, pursuing the man to the door of the office, and he followed in their train—all, excepting indeed the mother who had come to meet the little child she had not seen for so long, and whose limbs, refusing to bear her up any further, only allowed her to sink down, white as death, and trembling like an aspen leaf, upon the nearest bench. The little crowd would have pushed itself right into the telegraph office if the guards had not prevented it.

"There's a message come," one of them said, in order to restrain its eagerness, "and you'll hear all about it in a minute if you'll be quiet."

One moment of unspeakable anxiety, and then the man intrusted with the deliverance of the message reappeared. He was the same to whom

Raymond had twice before spoken. He had by nature a round and jovial face, but just now, as he stood before them with the written message in his hand, he seemed to have shrunk somehow, and grown suddenly pale. Yet still he attempted an air of great courage, if not cheerfulness.

"There's no denying there's been a slight accident," he said, "but we hope it won't prove of much consequence. The twelve o'clock train being after time, was run into by one of the down trains a little this side Ascot, and some damage done. A few parties have been hurt, and those parties are on their way here now by another train, together with them who haven't been hurt at all. So we hope in a few minutes that all here will meet their friends again safe and sound."

"Any killed?" demanded a faint voice in the crowd — faint, though belonging to a man, for he had come to meet his one-year wife returning from a visit to her mother in the country.

"Well, the stoker is gone, poor fellow, and the driver, and a better man never drove engine," was the reply, "and one or two more, perhaps; but we've had very few particulars, and no names, and must wait for the next message. But I feel confident there's none gone belonging to any here," continued the guard, with more benevolence than reason, perhaps, as he tried to smile away the ghastly fear he saw depicted in almost every face before him. The truth was the telegram had merely said in reference to the loss of life: Thirty killed and wounded — latter sent by a slow train; but, as the guard remarked to Raymond Norreys, when, having explained that he had no great personal interest in the loss, he extracted the facts from him, "It's as well to make the best of it to them at first, sir — they'll know it soon enough, poor creatures."

There was a dead hush in the crowd after the delivery of the telegraphic message. The men turned away, sick at heart, and some of them showing it in their whitened features, but all silent except they had women with them to support and comfort; but the wives and mothers became clamorous in their demand for more particulars, in their desire to know the worst — the very worst at once. The woman who had sunk upon a bench and yet heard all, now dragged her trembling limbs up again, and staggered to the office door.

"Oh, sir!" she said to the good-humored guard, with dry white lips that could scarcely form the words — "about a child — a little child!"

He took her by the shoulders and gently forced her down again upon the seat.

"Now you just stay quiet there," he said, "until I fetch you a glass of water. The child's safe enough, depend upon it — you'll have him in your arms in another minute."

But as he turned away to fetch her the refreshment that he promised, she sank quietly down upon her side, and fainted away.

One o'clock — twenty minutes past one — and still the eyes of the expectant crowd are turned eagerly in the direction by which the train with the survivors of the accident must arrive. There it is at last, slowly puffing its way towards the terminus, as though loath to be the carrier of such bad intelligence.

"Is it the very train?" "Are you sure?" "Might it not be from somewhere else?" "Is there another due?" were amongst the eager questions which burst from such lips as were not too excited to speak at all, or do anything but silently pray for strength, as the engine passed the platform, and dragged the line of carriages after it. It was not a long line; the passengers that could be moved had been sent on just as they were, without baggage or any other encumbrance, and the passengers that could be moved, alas! were few. Medical men were on the spot, and had been for some time, and the first thought, and the first rush, were for the carriages in which the wounded had been couveyed.

"There ain't many of them, sir," was the remark of the guard in attendance upon it; "and there's a doctor from Ascot along with them as it is."

He was a young guard, and new to the service, and his face was very pale as he said the words, and remembered how few were able to be moved, and how many more would never move again. As the railway carriages were emptied of their contents, the scene upon the platform

one of harrowing interest; for those who waited there, and happened to receive their friends intact, were as much overcome as those whose keen eyes took in at a glance that *theirs* were left behind. Indeed, Raymond observed that of the two, the former were far the most demonstrative, and many kisses, tears, hysterics, and faintings took place liberally on both sides, between the restored friends and relatives, whilst those whose hearts had sickened, as one stranger after another stepped out of the carriages, and were recognized, and still *theirs*, their own — perhaps their *one* — came not — either staggered off the platform, as though suddenly struck blind, or else sunk down, dumb and senseless to be trampled on as might be, beneath the feet of the embracing and embraced. But amongst the passengers who left the train by themselves, Raymond Norreys could see no one who answered to the description of the man he came to meet. He looked eagerly for a bent form and a gray head, but there seemed no old men amongst them. He had liberally tipped the officials on first hearing that there was likely to be a crush and a confusion, and they were all anxious to help him in the search.

"An old gentleman, sir — named Sir Archibald Norreys? Come this way, sir; perhaps some of the passengers may know him by sight."

But the passengers were all too much occupied with their own concerns to answer questions, and no Sir Archibald appeared.

"Afraid the old gentleman's not in the safety carriages, sir. This is the way to the wounded carriages;" and Raymond followed the friendly guard, with a shudder, to the fore part of the train.

But as he neared it, he was startled at hearing a familiar voice saying, —

"By Jove, sir, I shouldn't know I was hurt, except you told me so; I feel a little pain certainly, when I am moved, but nothing to signify. I believe I could walk if I was to try — by Jove, I do."

"You must not attempt it, sir; indeed, you must not," said the doctor's voice, raised in expostulation; and then, as Raymond rushed forward to confront the first speaker, he added to his brother practitioner, "He's fainted again, Mr. Stevens; we had better move him now into the waiting-room;" and Raymond saw the senseless form of Mr. Northland borne past him as in a dream.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, as he peeped forward to gain a better view — "Mr. Northland!"

"Is this passenger a friend of yours, sir?" demanded one of the doctors, who was assisting to carry poor "Cousin Gus" into the waiting-room.

"Yes, I know him; but he is not the friend I came to meet. By-the-by, are you from Ascot?" he continued, turning round to a face he had not seen upon the platform before.

"I am," was the reply.

"Can you tell me if an old gentleman, Sir Archibald Norreys, is amongst the wounded?"

"He is *killed*," was the sudden reply. "I know Sir Archibald well, I have attended the family. He was amongst the first who were extricated from the debris of the broken carriages. It has been a terrible smash, sir. I was very much shocked to see the poor old gentleman's body. I know it to be a fact, for I examined it myself." But here one of the other doctors touched the speaker on the arm and said, —

"Be careful what you say; perhaps it's a relation."

And indeed, Raymond Norreys had turned so very pale, that no one could help seeing that the news had in some manner powerfully affected him. He grasped at the door-lintel for support, as the Ascot doctor piled the assurances of the truth of his assertion one upon another, and appeared at first as if he had no words wherewith to answer him. The suddenness of the news, the extraordinary revolution which the confirmation of it would make in his fortunes, was too much for him. He had been shocked at the awful death of his cousin; he was still more shocked at the double tragedy of which he was now informed; but through, and above all feelings of the kind, he could not forget that the two accidents, dreadful as they were, must result in his becoming Sir Raymond Norreys, — that he was (even whilst he grasped that door-lintel), in fact, a baronet. It was not in mortal man to forget it, particularly as his affections were not interested on behalf

of the deceased; however much his humanity might prompt him to feel for the untimely sacrifices which had made him so.

"I am a relation of Sir Archibald's," he said, as he recovered his tongue and his self-command together, "and I am very much shocked to hear of his death, particularly as I had come to announce sad news to him. His son also died in London, this morning."

"What, that scamp!" exclaimed the young Ascot doctor. "I beg your pardon, though, I am forgetting myself; but you have really interested me very much. So young Norreys is dead, is he?" Who's the next heir?"

They had by this time deposited the form of Mr. Northland upon the waiting-room table, and the Ascot doctor appeared very anxious to discuss all particulars of the Norreys' succession with Raymond; and the latter, although he had no intention of gratifying his curiosity with respect to himself, thought he might give him some useful information, and to that end drew him on one side.

"Sir Archibald Norreys was a cousin of mine," he said hurriedly, in explanation of his own want of advice; "and I came here this morning to break the news of the loss of his son to him. Mr. Norreys also came to his death by an accident, and his body must await an inquest here. What ought I to do?"

"Your time is your own?" demanded the young surgeon.

"Entirely so," replied Raymond.

"Then I should first depute some one to stay with the remains of Mr. Norreys, and then cut down to Ascot, and make arrangements for Sir Archibald's body being moved to Woolcombe Rise, as soon as the inquest there is over. You can't do better than that. There is a butler in the house who has been there for years, and will arrange everything as well as you could do it yourself, and you'll find Sir Archibald's men of business there too; I know you will. Packer and Mitbury their names are; they have been there shooting for the last month. You should set them to work at once, to look up the heir. Who *is* the next heir? I believe *you* are," said the Ascot doctor, who was young and facetious, and not to be put down. "Then you must cut back here and superintend the removal of the poor young fellow's body to Berkshire. Fancy both of them gone in one day. Sad thing, isn't it? But I'm wanted again, and must be off." And the young doctor ran away as he spoke. Raymond felt he had given him good advice, but it was one of those moments in a man's life when he feels utterly confused and senseless, and hardly knows how to act for the best. So many events had crowded lately one upon another, and above them all was hovering the great and unexpected knowledge of the change in his prospects, that he felt quite giddy when he tried to think. However, the first thing was certainly to return to the Haymarket cafe, and have an interview with Mr. Barnett, and with that intention, and forgetting all else, Raymond was about to leave the station, when another of the doctors touched his shoulder in passing, and said, —

"I expect your friend there is more hurt than he thinks for, sir."

"Who? what friend?" demanded Raymond, waking from a reverie.

"The gentleman we first carried into the waiting-room. But his injuries are internal, and it is difficult to say."

Then Raymond remembered poor Gus Northland, and asked if he was sensible.

"Yes, quite so, and very anxious to be moved from here."

"I will go to him," said Raymond, hastily, and when he entered his presence, and was recognized, the pleasure of Cousin Gus was extreme.

"My dear fellow," he exclaimed, "I am so delighted to see you. You'll have me moved from this abominable place, won't you? I want to get down to Brighton to join Mrs. Craven, — Brighton always sets me up, it's the healthiest place in England, and my own doctor is there into the bargain."

"But are you fit to be moved, sir?" asked Raymond.

"Fit to be moved, — of course I am. I've hardly any pain, — except when I'm shaken. I fell under one of the carriages — such a smash! You should have been there, Norreys."

Raymond did not exactly coincide with this last opinion of Cousin Gus's,

but his friend the Ascot doctor now appearing in the room again, he asked him his opinion about Mr. Northland's case.

"Who is he?" first demanded that lively practitioner, and then added, "He's as obstinate as a mule, any way. No! of course, he oughtn't to be moved further than necessary, but he's just the kind of man who will suffer if thwarted. What's the matter with him? We can't tell yet; haven't had time to examine; but he was crushed under the carriage, and, I think, the numbness he boasts of, is incipient paralysis. However, I don't give it as a settled opinion, mind. Move him to the nearest hotel for the present, and when there you must act, of course, under further advice. I can't wait a minute;" and the young doctor, who was a very clever physician, all through his own energy and promptitude, disappeared in the crowd, to the aid of some other sufferer by the accident.

"What does he say?" demanded Gus Northland, who had guessed the import of Raymond's conference with the doctor.

"He says you must not be moved further than the nearest hotel, until we have more advice about you," replied Raymond.

"He's a fool," said Cousin Gus, unscrupulously; "why I'm scarcely hurt at all — bruised a bit, I dare say; and I shall feel it more to-morrow, and that's why I want to get on as soon as I can. Norreys, will you go down with me to Brighton?"

The proposition took Raymond very much by surprise; but high above the trouble and inconvenience of the arrangement (when he had so much business on his hands) rose the thought (and which would not be crushed even by the question of its use) that he should see Rachel again.

"Say you will," urged the wounded man; "it's only a couple of hours' journey."

"Let me get you safely to an hotel first," argued Raymond.

"Not till you've promised to do as I wish," rejoined Gus Northland; 'tisn't much!"

It wasn't much, after all, and Raymond promised as the sick man required him.

"But you must give me a few hours' grace, first," he pleaded, "for I have business to do which cannot be delayed."

And on these conditions Mr. Northland consented to be removed to the nearest hotel; and a stretcher was procured in consequence. As he was being carried away on it, Raymond walking by his side, the latter saw the friendly guard advancing to him, with an air of mystery.

"It's true, sir, I am sorry to say; some of the names have come on, and the old gentleman's is among them. This is he, isn't it sir?" and he displayed the official communication in which the name of Sir Archibald Norreys, of Woolcombe Rise, was plainly transcribed.

"He's well known about these parts, sir, so there ain't a shadow of doubt about the truth of it," was the man's final remark as he refolded the paper.

"Thank you," replied Raymond; "I shall run down there in a few hours myself," and then followed in the wake of Mr. Northland's stretcher.

Having seen him comfortably settled at the hotel, and sent for the best medical advice, Raymond left him to return to the Haymarket cafe. There he arranged with Mr. Barnett to have proper persons left in attendance upon his cousin's corpse, until such time as the coroner's inquest, having sat upon it, he should be at liberty to have it inclosed in a receptacle fitting the dust of the heir of Woolcombe Rise, the orders for the preparation of which Mr. Barnett promised to see given and carried out at once.

And then Raymond Norreys returned to the Waterloo Station, and flew down to Ascot, to which there were many extra trains running that day, in consequence of the accident, to inform the servants at Woolcombe Rise that they had lost their young master, and the late baronet's solicitors, Messrs. Packer and Mitbury, that the rightful heir would never come home to claim his father's acres. He found the grand old place in great confusion, the news of the baronet's sudden death having, of conrse, reached there; and the intelligence he brought himself was scarcely less unexpected, as Sir Archibald had left them in the morning with the simple knowledge that his son was ill, and his presence in town required.

The occasion of meeting, therefore, was a very awful one; and the two

gentlemen of business had scarcely less inclination to offer congratulations to their new client (who they knew well enough to be such) than Raymond had to receive them, for he could not yet contemplate, without the greatest horror, the means by which he found himself a baronet, and the owner of the noble property he now looked upon. So his visit to Woolcombe Rise was very short and very subdued; and having ascertained that the lawyers would see everything done that was necessary, he pleaded unavoidable business in London as a reason for his hasty departure.

"Of course, Sir Raymond, you will be down for the funerals," observed Mr. Packer, as he prepared to leave them.

Raymond started as his new honors were thus thrust upon him, but the gesture was not noticed by the solicitor.

"Of course," he answered; "in the mean while, Mr. Packer, you will oblige me by sending notices of these sad events to all whom it may concern to know them. I have been so much at sea, and our branch of the family has been so much separated from that of Sir Archibald, that I know none of his immediate friends, and the male relations of the name, I am aware, must be few and distant. But I should wish everything to be conducted in a style corespondent to the rank of the deceased."

"Certainly, Sir Raymond, certainly; your wishes shall in every respect be attended to. Good morning, Sir Raymond, good morning."

And "*Sir Raymond*," echoed from the lips of gentle and simple, were the last words that greeted our hero as he left Woolcombe Rise to return to the side of his poor, but troublesome friend Gus Northland.

CHAPTER XXXII.

MR. NORTHLAND IS OBSTINATE.

For when Raymond came to have another interview with him, he found that Mr. Northland promised to be very troublesome indeed. The physician who had been sent for to see him during his absence, and who was a man of great repute in his profession, met Raymond as he entered the hotel and begged to speak with him in private. He said that Mr. Northland's was a very different case to decide upon at once; that he certainly thought himself that he had received some severe internal injuries, and he was surprised that he did not appear to suffer more pain. He should have advised the patient being kept in bed, and very quiet for the next few days, until something further had been ascertained relative to his condition; but that he was so positive on the subject of being moved, and appeared so excited at the prospect of a refusal, that he feared lest crossing his inclinations might be productive of more harm than good, and bring on the very symptoms it was most desirous to avoid—namely, inflammatory ones. The physician understood that Mr. Norreys was an intimate friend of Mr. Northland's, and about to accompany him to Brighton; would he guarantee that he should be placed under able medical advice directly he arrived there?

To which Raymond replied, "You mistake in thinking that I am a very intimate friend of Mr. Northland's; I know him, certainly, and I promised if he was moved to Brighton, to go with him; but I can guarantee nothing beyond that. He has his own friends down there, so doubtless he will have the best of advice and nursing, but it would be far preferable they should be telegraphed for to come to him."

"Infinitely preferable," interposed the doctor; "in fact, I will not disguise from you, Mr. Norreys, that it may be the saving of his life; but Mr. Northland is so very self-willed and positive, that——"

But Raymond was beginning to see the risk which would attend his removal in a clearer light, and had little patience for what he considered a mere fancy.

"Oh, that is all nonsense," he said, decisively, "I will speak to him myself;" and strode up-stairs with the genuine conviction that a few words

from him would bring Cousin Gus to reason. For after all, this going down to Brighton at the present moment, when his head and hands were so full of business, was a very inconvenient affair. He had not been able yet even to inform his mother and sisters of the deaths of Sir Archibald Norreys and his son. And as to the hope which had sprung up in his heart on first entertaining the proposition, — the hope of seeing Rachel again, and of listening to her voice, — what mattered it, after all, since no good could possibly accrue from it? She was virtually dead and lost to him. No seeing her again, no hanging on the tones of her voice, could unmake her what she was, or render her capable of clearing herself again in his eyes. No! the inheritor of a title which had been claimed by a dozen generations, and the owner of Woolcombe Rise, must thenceforth live unmated, and die unblest, since no honors or wealth or wishes could restore Rachel Norreys to the innocence he once believed that she possessed. And as the thought struck Raymond's heart, he felt how thankfully he could resign all and each to be able to call one woman, for one day only, his faithful wife. But the alternative was not his to choose, and the knowledge did not make him more disposed to be lenient towards the apparently unreasonable desires of poor Gus Northland. It was all folly, it was nonsense; the proper thing to do was to telegraph for Mrs. Craven to come up to town; and the proper thing should be done. But when he entered the presence of his wounded friend, his thoughts took another turn. The soft brown eyes of poor Cousin Gus were looking so much more anxious than obstinate, his manner was so excited, and his face so flushed, that Raymond felt that if mischief had not already commenced, a very little opposition would be the means of making it do so; and he scarcely liked the responsibility thus thrust upon his hands. Still he attempted to act up to the determination with which he had entered the room, as he drew a chair beside the invalid's couch, and said, "Well! how are you now, Mr. Northland? all the better for being quiet, I dare say."

"I'm keeping up pretty well," was the reply, "but deucedly anxious to start. What a time you've been, Norreys! Four hours, by Jove! When does the next train go to Brighton?"

"I couldn't have returned sooner, or I would have done so," replied Raymond. "But are you quite determined still to go on to Brighton? A man is generally a good deal shaken, you know, by an accident of this sort; and the doctor so strongly advises your being kept quiet — indeed, they said the same at the railway station. Suppose I telegraph for Mrs. Craven to come up here and see you? That would amount to the same thing, wouldn't it?"

But the sick man's look of anxiety, lest the proposal should be carried into effect, increased to one of positive dread as Raymond rose from his seat as if with the intention of executing his purpose.

"Stay, Norreys," he exclaimed, grasping his arm; "no, it wouldn't do at all! You haven't done it already, have you?" and then, as Raymond did not immediately deny the charge, he added, "If you have, I'll send another to stop her, by Jove I will, if I go to the station myself to do it. I'll go down to Brighton alone; I don't want any one's aid. I'll ——"

"Pray compose yourself," interrupted Raymond, surprised at this burst of excitement on the part of supine Cousin Gus; "I have done nothing of the kind, nor do I intend to do so without your knowledge. I only want to persuade you to be advised for the best; travelling so soon may make you worse."

"Pooh! pooh!" said Gus Northland, in return, "it won't make me any worse; I tell you I suffer scarcely any pain — I have said so all along, haven't I? and I *must* go to Brighton to-night."

"You may pooh-pooh the matter as much as you please," replied Raymond, irritated at the other's perversity, "but I have set the risk you will run before you, and if, after that, you suffer for your own obstinacy, do not blame me."

"I shall blame no one," said Mr. Northland, "but if you won't take me down, I must go alone. Why, my own doctor, Sherard, lives there. We always have him up to Craven Court when any one's ill — we do, Norreys; and what folly it would be in me not to go to him when I have the oppor-

tunity. Besides, I don't want any doctor; it's a mere bruise I've received, that brown paper and vinegar will cure; and—you *will* take me there, Norreys, won't you? I *particularly* wish to go.

And his tone of authority sank into one of utter beseeching, as he put his feverish hand into Raymond's and made his last request. As he did so, the latter started to find how hot and dry it was, and felt, with the physician, that further parley would perhaps only make the patient much worse; and so he soothed him with a promise, and left him to ascertain how soon the train could take them to Brighton.

"It's of no use," he said, as he thrust a double fee into the physician's hand; "he is bent upon going, and even persuasion seems to agitate him; besides, he continues to insist that he feels scarcely any pain."

The doctor shook his head.

"I cannot understand that," he said; "however, it is one of those cases, Mr. Norreys, where the mind is evidently strongly working upon the body, and the only thing to be done is to try and humor both. At the present time I can confidently say that emotion of any sort will do Mr. Northland more harm than even a shaking. Better take him on then, as he desires, and get him into a bed and under good care as soon as possible, and he may not suffer much in consequence."

"I have your sanction, then, for his travelling?" said Raymond.

"Only because the alternative would probably be more hurtful to him," was the dubious reply; "of two evils, choose the least."

And acting upon this advice, Raymond Norreys (having despatched a hasty telegram to tell his mother not to be alarmed at his absence) found himself an hour later journeying towards the sea, with Gus Northland stretched at full length on a mattress beside him. It was by this time seven or eight o'clock in the evening, and the only light in the railway carriage was that of the flickering oil-lamp, by which it was impossible to read. Raymond sat for some time after they had left London silent and absorbed. He did not feel inclined to talk or make himself agreeable; he was too much annoyed at the continued obstinacy and selfishness of Mr. Northland in persisting to make this journey against the advice of those who knew better than himself. It was of a piece, so Raymond thought, with the rest of his foolish life—so incapable of directing himself—so averse to being led by others; and the reflection made him feel harsher, than he liked afterwards to remember, to the sufferer beside him. For as time went on, the oil-lamp—dim and uncertain as it was—yet showed the surrounding objects sufficiently clearly to enable him to note the changes which were passing over the face of Mr. Northland. When they first left the Waterloo Station he had kept up the same appearance of unconcern and disregard to pain which had characterized him since his accident; but as the train rushed rapidly through the night air, leaving town after town behind it, it appeared as though he thought it no longer necessary to keep up the indifference which it was evident he did not feel; for by the undefined light of the oil-lamp, Raymond could see how much paler he was growing with every fresh mile they traversed, and how frequently his features twitched when the motion became rougher or more rapid; and once or twice during the long tunnels, which lie on the outskirts of Brighton, he fancied that he heard him groan.

"I am afraid, Northland, that you are feeling this shaking more than you choose to confess," Raymond said, when, having passed through the last, he could once more depend upon making his voice heard; "but we are very near Brighton now, so I hope the worst of it is over."

The sick man unclosed his eyes, and smiled a ghastly smile at him.

"You're a good fellow, Norreys," he said, faintly; "and I thought you were a clever one; but I've been sharper than you have to-day," and Cousin Gus tinkled a species of unmanly laugh, that was very unpleasant to listen to.

"How do you mean?" demanded Raymond, with curiosity.

"Why, with respect to myself," Mr. Northland replied. "I didn't think I was so good an actor. It's a pity I didn't take to the stage long ago, for I've been an idle fellow all my life. Why, my dear Norreys, I've cheated the doctors and all of you; for if I had only confessed one half of the pain I

have suffered to-day, they would have strapped me to my bed before they would have let me travel down here, — that they would!"

"You don't mean to tell me you are as bad as all that?" exclaimed Raymond, in alarm. "Good heavens! what may I not have to answer for?"

"Nothing! my dear Norreys; nothing! It isn't your fault. You're the best fellow I ever came across. I don't know what I should have done without you! For I must have come down to Brighton to-night any way. You've been an immense comfort to me," and the sick man pressed his hand as he spoke.

"But what made you so positive about travelling, Northland, if you felt so ill?" persisted Raymond. "Mrs. Craven would have attended you in London, and the doctor, too, for that matter. It was very wrong, indeed, of you. You may have risked your life by the imprudence."

"No such great risk, if I have," replied the other, with the same sickly smile. "But I have urgent business here; and my great fear, from the moment I was hurt, was lest I should die before I settled it. Very important business, Norreys; and that must not be delayed; and you are the very man I could have wished to accompany me; for from the first moment that the falling carriages struck me here" — he continued, laying his hand upon his chest — "I felt that I was badly hurt. I did, Norreys. And I determined nothing should keep me from coming down here to-night. The doctors would have known it, too, if I had only told them the feelings I experienced, but I gave the lie to every question they put to me." And Cousin Gus feebly chuckled over the remembrance of his having outwitted the medical men. Utterly inactive and indifferent to passing events in his lifetime, he now appeared just as inert in the prospect of the death, which he knew he had reason to fear was marching down upon him.

But Raymond was horror-struck at his last avowal, and the part he had taken in his removal.

"You did very wrong — very wrong, indeed," he exclaimed, in his excitement. "I do not know what I shall say to Mrs. Craven about it. And when she would have attended you so readily, too."

"Ah! so she would, God bless her!" said Gus Northland. "She's been always only too good to me; and it is on her business and yours that I desired to travel. Don't think twice about it, Norreys. Whatever happens would have happened anyway; and, to tell you the truth, I've never thought I should get over it from the moment that it took place."

But the look of astonishment in Raymond Norreys's eyes, as Gus Northland alluded to the business which carried him to Brighton having some connection with himself, could not fail to attract the other's notice.

"You are incredulous, Norreys, as to the possibility of my affairs having any reference to yours; but you'll be wiser an hour hence. Oh! these trains! how slow they are; shall we never be there?"

But even as he spoke the carriages halted for the inspection of tickets, and in another minute they had arrived at the station. Raymond lost no time in procuring as easy a conveyance as he could, and, at a foot's pace, proceeded with his charge to the Marine Parade. He was impatient to deliver him over to Mrs. Craven's keeping; impatient to learn what business it could be, having any reference to himself, that had made Mr. Northland persist in his determination to travel to Brighton; doubly impatient, though he would not acknowledge it, even to his own heart, to find himself once more in the presence of the wife whom he distrusted. When the vehicle stopped at its destination, Raymond's heart appeared to stop with it.

"Stay!" he exclaimed, eagerly, laying his hand upon Mr. Northland's arm. "Keep quiet for a minute. I must run up first and prepare them for your reception."

And having obtained the entrance (with a ring only) to Mrs. Craven's abode, he left his friend in the carriage, and walked up-stairs to announce their unexpected arrival. Mrs. Craven, her son, and Rachel Norreys, were sitting alone in the drawing-room; for Cecil had only returned to Aldershot for the purpose of obtaining leave to spend a longer time with them. They were all so unhappy; there was so miserable a restraint between his mother and her guest, and so great an anxiety on his own

part to see the wretched mystery, which had caused them all such pain, cleared up, that he felt no relief except in being on the spot administering such comfort as he might to Rachel, in the prospect of everything coming right in the end, and urging Mrs. Craven, by every means but undisguised solicitations, to make herself and them happy as she best knew how. But although he had mooted the painful subject more than once to his mother, her cry continued to be, "Wait till Cousin Gus returns. I have written to him, Cecil, and he will soon be here; pray, wait patiently (ask Rachel to wait patiently) until your cousin returns."

And now Cousin Gus had returned, was even at the door, though as yet they knew it not. In reality it was only a week since Rachel had left the Abbey Lodge; but, counting by the length of the weary hours as they had dragged their slow course along for her, it might have been a month. She had hoped great things from Mrs. Craven's note to Raymond; surely, a third person telling him that she was convinced of her perfect innocence (the very mother of the man for whose sake her character had been aspersed) would weigh greatly with him in her favor (and although Rachel was too proud to acknowledge it, she would have resigned everything she possessed to hear him ask her forgiveness for the cruel suspicion he had entertained of her); but when his curt, cool answer came, she had lost that hope, and with it the little humility that she retained. She had nothing further to say to him, or for herself. Truth was not the slightest avail, and she possessed no other weapon; and notwithstanding Cecil's constant assurances that all would be cleared up eventually, she imagined, from that moment that, for her, life was over. And poor Major Craven's prospects were not of the brightest, either. Lady Riversdale's letter, in which she affirmed that, unless this scandal was fully explained and done away with, she could no longer hear of his engagement with Lady Frances Morgan, still lay unanswered in his desk; to say nothing of a tiny secret note, blistered with tears, from the young lady herself, in which she implored her dearest Cecil only to "*say* it was not true, because, notwithstanding what she had *heard* and *seen* whilst at the Court, she was ready to disbelieve it all, at one word from himself." But Major Craven as yet could not say that word, and, therefore, both ladies were kept in suspense because he was too proud to ask their sufferance of his inability to explain himself, and too honorable to satisfy their scruples at the cost of his given word. But if ever he cherished a feeling in his heart for Mrs. Craven that was not all that a son's should be towards a mother, it was during that long week of suspense and anxiety which preceded the arrival of poor Cousin Gus. Raymond Norreys stepped lightly up the stairs, and, unannounced, entered the drawing-room, wishing to take the party by surprise; and he certainly obtained his desire, for had a ghost stood amongst them suddenly, they could not have been more astonished. Cecil Craven, with a decanter of wine on the table before him, was carelessly turning over the papers of the day; his mother, employed in some fancy-work, was vainly attempting to divert her thoughts from the sad topic which engrossed them; whilst Rachel, sitting on a sofa by herself, away from the light and near the fire, was gazing into it, — with clasped hands and knitted brow, — as she tried to answer the question to herself, of why she had ever been born.

As the door suddenly opened, and her husband appeared in their midst, Mrs. Craven, thinking of nothing but immediate reconciliation between the two, sprung to her feet with an exclamation of blended surprise and pleasure; Cecil also, knowing that Raymond's suspicion of his wife, if not correct, was, under the circumstances, justifiable, was not unwilling to extend a welcome to him; Rachel alone, having uttered a faint cry as she recognized the figure which had now advanced into the centre of the room, stood for a few moments motionless and irresolute, and then sunk down again upon the sofa whence she had risen.

But Raymohd Norreys appeared to take no notice of any one there but Mrs. Craven, and with her he very slightly shook hands; as to Cecil, our hero looked at him as if his dark eyes would cut him through; and to that part of the room where Rachel was (although the loud beating of his heart told him she was there) he never even turned his head; glancing at the *mistress of the house* alone, — speaking to her alone, — he said, hurriedly,

"I have to apologize for intruding amongst you, Mrs. Craven, but my visit here to-night is not from choice, but necessity; I regret to say that—pray don't alarm yourself—Mr. Northland, whilst in the railway, met with a slight accident,—or we trust it will prove so."

"Oh, good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, clasping her hands, "he is killed."

"No, indeed, he is not," quickly rejoined Raymond; "he is waiting below in the carriage, but as I was fearful you would be frightened if you saw him carried up-stairs without any preparation, I ran up first to tell you of his accident."

"And you have brought him here, Mr. Norreys!" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, weeping. "Oh, how good of you,—how can I ever thank you enough! Pray, bring him up-stairs at once; my poor Gustavus! Cecil, go with Mr. Norreys."

"Thank you, I require no aid," replied Raymond, haughtily, as he turned to descend the stairs again; "but you had better prepare the bed for his reception."

"Not a word to you, my love; not a look," exclaimed poor Mrs. Craven sympathetically, as she turned to where Rachel stood, and embraced her trembling form.

"Never mind me,—pray don't think of me," was the quick reply; "I neither need any notice, nor wish it."

Oh, rebellious and sensitive heart! in reality aching for one glance to say it was forgiven and understood, how wonderfully it could disguise its deepest feelings at the call of its master passion,—pride! But Mrs. Craven had no leisure for further pity or remonstrance, and by the time that the united efforts of Raymond Norreys and the coachman had conveyed Gus Northland, white and faint, to the top stair of the landing, she was ready waiting to direct their steps into a bedroom on that floor, and not until they had deposited their burden there did she venture to obtrude herself upon the notice of the invalid.

"Oh, my dearest Gustavus!" she then said, sinking by the side of the bed, and giving way to a flood of tears as she noted the extreme pallor of his face, and the drawn expression of his features, which was very visible, now that he was brought into the bright candle-light. "How did this happen? are you much hurt? shall I send for Dr. Sherard?"

"Yes, certainly, send for the doctor at once, Mrs. Craven," said Raymond, taking upon himself to answer her last question; "and if you will give me his address I will call on him on my return, for having deposited Mr. Northland into your safe-keeping, my business here is over."

"Norreys," said Gus Northland, who had now partially recovered from the faintness occasioned by his being moved, "you mustn't go; you must stay."

"I cannot, indeed," said poor Raymond; "it is impossible; my business——"

"It must wait for mine," repeated Cousin Gus. "I came down here to-night with one purpose, and I won't be disappointed of it! Margaret, my dear, where is Rachel?"

Raymond started to hear his wife named thus familiarly by one who was nearly a stranger to her; still more so, when Mrs. Craven, instead of appearing astonished like himself, only exclaimed,—

"Not now, dear Gus; oh! not now,—wait till you are stronger; to-morrow will do as well,—it will be too much for you in your present state of weakness."

But Cousin Gus was determined.

"*Now*," he said, emphatically; "at once. I feel weaker every moment, Margaret, and I may never be stronger. I came down here to-night for this only, and it shall be done! Fetch Rachel to me."

Then Raymond, as in a dream, saw Mrs. Craven leave the room, and return with Rachel and her son; and still, as in a dream, heard Mr. Northland—"Cousin Gus," the dependent relative who lived at Craven Court on sufferance—say, in a distinct voice, as he folded his weak arms round her,—

"*Raymond* Norreys, this is *my daughter*!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IN WHICH THE MYSTERY IS SOLVED.

This startling piece of intelligence falling like an electric shock on the ears of at least three of those who heard it, still appeared to affect them very differently.

Rachel, who had been taken so unexpectedly into the embrace of Mr. Northland that she had no time to remonstrate, burst from it again, with an energy which almost amounted to violence; as she turned with blazing eyes and confronted Mrs. Craven, and the question, Is this true? came vehemently from her parted lips.

Cecil, who had grown very pale when his cousin spoke, started forward ejaculating, —

"Cousin Gus! Good Heavens! it is impossible!" whilst his mother, apparently unable to meet the eyes of either of them, buried her face in the bedclothes, repeating, in a burst of grief, "Oh! dearest Gus! why didn't you put it off until to-morrow? I asked you to put it off until to-morrow."

But Raymond Norreys had been so utterly unprepared for the disclosure, and, although he listened to the various phrases used, attached so little meaning to their import, that he appeared the least moved of any at the scene which was being acted before him. Standing apart, with folded arms, and lip that had curled proudly at the entrance of his wife, he no more believed what he had heard than the others dared to disbelieve it. Mr. Northland had travelled to Brighton by rail, against the advice of the profession, and his head was suffering in consequence. He was mad — they were all mad together, excepting, indeed, himself. So he argued as he quietly stood still, and was the only incredulous one there.

Presently the voice of Mr. Northland was heard again, —

"It is better so, Margaret; it's over now, and I'm glad of it. I received your letters, my dear, and was hurrying down here, to-day, with quite another purpose in my head — quite another purpose, when the accident happened; and then, as I lay crushed beneath the carriages, thinking every minute would be my last, I seemed to see the extent of my selfishness (of the selfishness of my whole life). It came before me as clear as day, and I swore I wouldn't sleep until I had done as you asked me, and acknowledged my daughter before the world; and now I've done it."

"Oh! no, dear Gustavus," sobbed Mrs. Craven, "not selfish; don't say that; always the best and the kindest of men."

Good and kind he may have, and doubtless had been, but weak and erring to a degree, and on his death-bed Gustavus Northland knew it for a truth. He was about to silence his cousin, and beg her not to flatter him, when Raymond's voice was heard.

"Mrs. Craven," it said, "are we to take this communication on Mr. Northland's part as a pleasantry, or a fact? Because, if the latter, you are keeping us in unnecessary suspense."

"He is right," said the wounded man. "Margaret, tell them the rest."

Then Mrs. Craven rose from her kneeling attitude, and seeing three pairs of eyes turned expectantly towards her, looked like a stag brought to bay by its pursuers. Still more so, when she reared her head almost defiantly, shook her hair away from her forehead, and said, gazing steadily forward the while, —

"It is a fact; you know it all now — Rachel Norreys is the daughter of Gustavus Northland and myself. I have been his wife for the last four-and-twenty years."

"His *wife!*" cried Rachel, springing to her side. "Oh! Mrs. Craven, say those words again!"

"His *wife!*" re-echoed the voice of her son. "Thank God, mother! I can stand anything now," and he tried to take her in his arms. But she turned from him and from Rachel, and threw her arm round the nerveless form of Gustavus Northland, as though she would shelter him from even their reproaches.

"Oh! of what have they suspected me?" she exclaimed. "Gustavus! what have my children been thinking of me?"

"Nothing but what might have been expected from the complication of evils my conduct has brought upon you, Margaret," he replied. "But cheer up, my dear, it's over now."

"*Mother*," said Rachel, faintly, as she touched Mrs. Craven on the arm; "mother (whom I have known for mine for so many silent, heart-breaking months), will you not speak to me? Will you not acknowledge me for your child?"

"My darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Craven, as she turned and caught the girl fondly in her embrace. "My only daughter, my heart has yearned over you, Rachel, ever since we have been separated; and the hardest trial in my life has been my inability to acknowledge you as my best possession. Gus, dear, give her your blessing. This is the first time, since the hour of her birth, that we have been permitted to say together and openly, 'God bless our child.'"

"You all seem to be coming to a very comfortable understanding between yourselves," interposed Raymond Norreys, who felt more and more mystified as the various greetings were given and acknowledged; "but you seem to have forgotten that I may require a little information as to the reason that I now hear the lady, whom I always knew, and married as the daughter of Dr. Browne, addressed as the daughter of Mr. Northland. I am perfectly in the dark, and feel I have as good a right as any one to demand some explanation of the mystery."

"Of course," exclaimed Cecil. "Mother, this news has been long enough delayed already, God knows! Make short work of it now, and let us hear all there is to hear."

"Directly, Cecil, directly," she replied. "Mr. Norreys, I ought to apologize to you, I suppose, but in the first excitement of such a confession you must make allowances for our not having eyes or ears for any one but our immediate selves. I hope that the miserable misunderstandings which have cropped up amongst us lately will be fully accounted for when you have heard my history. My name is Margaret Northland—Rachel and Cecil are brother and sister."

"Good God!" exclaimed Raymond, as the thought of all the misery the want of such knowledge had occasioned flashed upon his mind. "Rachel! why did you not tell me of this before?"

But although he appealed to her thus directly, Rachel turned away from him, and professed to be occupied with something relating to the comfort of her newly-found father.

"Because her lips were sealed by an oath," answered Mrs. Craven, quickly, "which Rachel, to save her happiness even, dared not break. Oh! Raymond, could you have trusted her, things might have been different; but I do not blame you. Circumstances were brought, by the treachery of that woman, so strongly against them both, that I feel *I* am the only one open to censure in the matter."

"No Margaret, you are not," said the feeble voice of her husband; "it was for love of me you did it."

"*I* am the only one to blame," repeated Mrs. Craven. "Cecil, my dearest boy, don't look at me like that. I have greatly wronged you both. God knows that I repent of it this day."

With her eyes fixed upon her son, and addressing herself to him, as if he of all those present most demanded explanation and reparation at her hands, Margaret Craven proceeded,—

"I did not love your father, Cecil; and marrying him was the first wrong step in my career. I had loved my Cousin Gustavus before that, and pledged my faith to him; but neither of us had any money, and, therefore, we were told it could not be. Your father must have guessed something of the truth, for when he died and left me free to choose again, I found, by his will that, in the event of a second marriage, every farthing of the jointure he left me, as well as the property of Craven Court, was to pass from my hands into those of your guardians, and I was to be left penniless."

"It was a cruel will,—an infamous will!" said Cecil, hotly, to whom his *father was but a name*, and the love of his mother a household word.

"Hush! dear," she replied; "a man has a right to do as he chooses with his own, and the infamy lay with those who tried to circumvent, by a dishonorable action, his dying wishes."

"That's me," interposed poor Cousin Gus.

"Not you, not you, my dearest," cried Mrs. Craven, flying to his side and folding him in her embrace, and then turning to her auditors, she continued, —

"However blameworthy the remainder of my story may seem to be, however culpable the subsequent actions I have to relate, remember, that throughout, it was *my* thought and *my* doing. My husband there is blameless of everything, except of loving me too much."

Not one there present believed the generous lie; but they admired the nobility of purpose which had dictated it, and suffered it to pass unnoticed. Then she continued, —

"When I was a widow, and we met again, we loved each other, if possible, better than before, and often lamenting over our inability to marry (both being so poor), we came at last to the proposal and carrying out of a secret marriage. Oh! Cecil, I am so ashamed to tell you this part of my history; but you were such a child, I did not consider, in the furtherance of my own selfish designs, how forgetful I was of your interests. Can you ever forgive me?"

"If there is any need of my forgiveness, mother, above that of others," he replied, "you have it freely. But go on with your story, for we are impatient."

"We were married privately, and for awhile there seemed no chance of our secret being discovered; but in the course of another year I found that I was likely to become a mother, and at first feared that everything must be disclosed. But amongst my old admirers and most intimate friends, was poor Alfred Browne, and to him, being a doctor, I at last, under a promise of secrecy, summoned courage to confess my dilemma. He was a single man, single (so he said) for my sake, and he not only promised to attend me during my confinement, but offered to take my infant and bring it up as his own. And when (whilst purporting to be away on a visit in the country) my little daughter was born, he did as we had agreed he should do, and carried off my baby and her nurse to his own home, and brought her up as his own. Yes, for *this*, — for the sake of possessing a few luxuries and comforts, which have never brought me a moment's happiness, I consented to give up my daughter for life to the man whom she called 'father.'"

"He was a father, indeed, to me," murmured Rachel; "no one could have been dearer."

"You would not have loved your own father, probably, half so well," interposed Cousin Gus, dejectedly.

"Oh! don't say that," replied Rachel. "How can you tell, since I never had the opportunity?" (And she reddened as she recalled the last interview she had had with him in the shrubbery, and the indignation she had then felt at his supposed liberty). "And forgive me," she added, turning to Mrs. Craven, "that I have ever dared to have a thought with regard to yourself, that was not pure and true and honorable. I might have known my mother would be such."

"Forgive you, Rachel?" replied Mrs. Craven, mournfully; "it is your parents who should kneel for forgiveness to you this night, and have done so, in spirit, years ago. Alfred Browne then took my deserted little girl, and reared her as his own. He did not, at that time, belong to the 3d Royal Bays. When he joined that corps Rachel was several years old, and no one knew but that she was his own orphaned child. But since that time, I may truly say that I have led a miserable life; although I have been thankful to know that, through our means, my little girl enjoyed all the comforts and luxuries of this world; yet her heart, the possession of which I so much coveted, I had given over into the keeping of another. And for *this*, for the knowledge that I had a husband I dared not own, and a daughter whom I dared not say I loved, I have borne a guilty, uneasy conscience, that has never lost sight, for one moment, of the fact that I was defrauding my son of his lawful possessions. Cecil, I have tried to make it up to you by a useless liberality; but that is no excuse for me. Henceforward, of

course, Craven Court and the income which goes with it, will belong to you alone. I know you will not be hard, my dearest boy, in pressing the demands which you might justly claim of me; but, if I go to jail for it, from this day my name is Margaret Northland, and my place is by the side of my acknowledged husband. Would to God I had never been tempted to do other than acknowledge him! But it was for your sake, dear Gustavus,—heaven knows it was, and for yours only." And then, the recital of her shame and sin concluded, the unhappy woman sank down, overpowered, by his side.

Cecil was the next to speak.

"Mother," he said frankly, "you know me too well, I hope, to think that *I* should press demands upon you or your husband, so let that pass. You have made me so happy to-night by the confession that your name is Northland, and that my sister Rachel is the child of wedded parents, that I can only thank Heaven for the knowledge, and think any means cheap by which I have arrived at it."

"Cecil, how could you think otherwise?" his mother said, reproachfully.

"How could I *not* think otherwise, you mean, mother. Judge for yourself. You placed me in Browne's regiment with a wish, I now presume, that my sister and myself should become intimate friends."

"He promised me—Alfred promised me—that he would further your intimacy by every means in his power," she interposed, eagerly.

"Under the circumstances it was scarcely wise, perhaps," he answered, shortly; "however, we need not discuss the matter now; he fulfilled his promise to you. Watching together one day by Browne's death-bed, he (being partially delirious at the time) told us that he was not Rachel's father, and that we were brother and sister. At first, naturally, we disbelieved him; but afterwards, on pressing him (when more sensible) for an explanation of his words, he became alarmed at the information we had acquired, and whilst admitting its truth, refused steadfastly to tell us any more, and further, bound us by a most solemn oath, repeated again in the last hour of his life, that we should never reveal what he had said to any one, or under any circumstances, as we hoped for heaven. What could we think after that? I appeal to all here. Rachel was my sister—I was her brother, but we had no means of discovering anything further. Mother, what *could* we think, excepting that a great sin lay at your door, and that Rachel was a child you were ashamed to own? and that belief bound us closer together, perhaps, than under ordinary circumstances we should have been; for I felt that the day might possibly arrive when she would have no counsellor or protector but myself."

And Cecil scowled (as much as it was possible for his soft blue eyes and fair eyebrows to scowl) at Raymond Norreys, who still stood apart and silent, with strange feelings of remorse and self-reproach stirring in his breast, and making it throb with a sensation not unakin to pain, as the words he listened to rendered the dark past every moment clearer and more distinct.

"But only knowing you to be my *mother*," now pleaded the thrilling voice of Rachel, "I have felt towards you all the depth and fulness of a daughter's love, notwithstanding the misery that I have experienced from the knowledge of the stigma (which I supposed to rest) upon my birth. I will not say that I have never remembered it, except to pity you and myself for having been forbid by fate to comfort one another by mutual affection. I will not say that I have never unwished myself your child, or thought of you and my unknown father without feelings of the deepest reverence and love, because I have suffered very deeply during my short lifetime, and suffering is hard to bear in secret and alone. I have been brought up by the most indulgent of guardians, and permitted to be wild and wayward from my youth, and perhaps too inconsequent of the result of any action upon which I had set my mind; but I can lay my hand upon my heart, and truly say, that in all my doubts and fears; in the anxious suspense that the secret knowledge of my birth has given me, and the cruel suspicion under which it has lately thrown me, I have never harbored such regret for *myself*—I have never shed such tears for my own sufferings as I have *done for the* shame and disgrace of which my unhappy birth (or so imagined) *must* have been to you the cause."

Speaking thus—her beaming eyes fixed upon the face of Mrs. Craven—her sympathetic voice falling and rising, in mellow cadence with the spirit of her words—how Raymond, gazing upon Rachel's animated features, drank in every tone she uttered, and infinitely longed to rush forward, and falling at her feet, implore her to turn the same glances upon him, if only for a moment! How, when he saw Mrs. Craven throw her arms about the graceful drooping figure, and lay her weary, conscience-stricken head upon the throbbing breast, did he sigh that the same shelter were open to his embrace—the same pillow to his aching head! But Rachel's mother, answering her, he still stood listening in silent anxiety, as if he expected to hear some hope for himself issue from her lips.

"My dearest Rachel," she said, "I feel that what you say is true, because I know your worth, my dear. I knew it long before we met this time, from the assurances of my dear old friend. Throughout your life (though you were unaware of it) I have felt most deeply with you. At the time of your hasty marriage——"

("Ah!" exclaimed Rachel, and the exclamation was so like the offspring of a sudden pang, that Raymond's heart stood still to hear it.)

"—— In all your little troubles, or your childish illnesses, there have always been anxious hearts at home to learn the upshot and the issue of them all. You believe it, do you not?"

"I do," she answered. "Let me prove it to you, mother, by the remainder of life. I ask nothing better than to stay by your side, and show you what a daughter's love can be."

But Raymond was spared the pain of hearing these last words, for as the women were whispering to, and caressing one another, Cecil Craven had approached him, and, with his usual frank generosity, been the first to extend the hand of reconciliation.

"Norreys," he said, "you have heard everything. I suppose to-night sees all this misery set right again. You have, I know, no personal enmity towards myself, and you will not refuse my hand, since we are brothers."

The other's grasp went out with immediate cordiality, and clasped his in a firm pressure.

"I hope you know me too well to doubt it, Craven, and sufficient of the circumstances under which this misunderstanding arose, to justify me in my suspicion and demand an explanation. But as to this night setting matters right again, I doubt if a lifetime will do that."

"My dear fellow, what do you mean?" asked Cecil Craven, in astonishment.

"Look at Rachel," was the reply; "watch her face when I speak to her, and tell me then, if with so much inherent pride in her nature, there is any reason to hope that she will ever forgive me for even suspecting her."

Cecil did look, and thought the aspect of affairs appeared unpromising, particularly as his mother seemed to be urging Rachel to some step to which a haughty refusal was plainly depicted in her face. But glancing round, he saw something else which diverted him from his former observation. Gustavus Northland, whom they all seemed (in the engrossing nature of their mutual conferences) to have for the while forgotten, was lying back upon his pillows, appearing, now that the excitement of telling the story of his daughter's birth was over, considerably worse for the reaction.

"Mother," exclaimed Cecil, directing her attention to the fact, "look at —— at your husband. This has been too much for him; we had best send for Sherard at once."

"I said so, from the first," exclaimed Raymond. "Give me the address, Mrs. Craven, and I will go for him directly."

He felt restless and out of place amongst them, and longed to be actively employed. Mrs. Craven at first demurred about giving him such trouble, but it was no moment for ceremony. Mr. Northland was evidently becoming much worse, and she was unwilling for her son to leave her, and so with a few words of gratitude to Raymond, she directed his steps to the medical man's house, and in another minute he was clear of the Marine Parade, and on his way to summon Dr. Sherard.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PRIDE BOLTS THE DOOR AGAINST HAPPINESS.

Striding along in the keen night air, Raymond Norreys felt his hot heart burn within him as he recalled the past interview; the revelations of which it had been the occasion; and above all, the glorious, never-to-be-forgotten fact, that Rachel was innocent? Yes! if he was doomed never to call her really his; never to feel her heart throbbing against his own; to hear her lips repeat those blessed words, which now came back to him with feelings of intoxicating delight, "Raymond, *I love you*," still he would die the happier for knowing that *his* love, his wife, the only woman who had ever cost him more than a passing sigh, was pure and innocent and undefiled as she, on whom such love was staked, should be. Lost in thoughts like these, he arrived at Dr. Sherard's in a state of such excitement, that that worthy philanthropist, attributing his manner to his apprehension of the danger in which Mr. Northland lay, made the circumstance an extra reason for immediately turning out of his warm bed into the cold night air, and hastening to the relief of the patient. But when he arrived at the Marine Parade, alas! there was little left for him to do. Twelve hours, or more, had then elapsed since the occurrence of the accident, and he found the internal wounds of the injured man in a state of high inflammation, which, aggravated as it had been by the railway travelling and subsequent agitation, was beyond his power to subdue. All through that night, whilst Dr. Sherard sat by his bedside, vainly attempting to mitigate his sufferings, poor Gus Northland lay delirious and in the extremest pain, as he alternately called on his daughter not to curse him, or pitifully implored his wife to say that the selfishness of his life, in accepting her offer to live upon her means and imperil her fame, had not been a little, just a little, atoned for, by the last act of which he had been capable.

"I've set it all right, he would mutter between his wilder ravings,—"I cheated the doctors. I did! and it's all right now. Margaret, tell me that it's all right."

His doctor said that there would be a great interval of pain by-and-by, to be followed (but this he kept to himself for the present) by a longer interval still, an interval of everlasting rest, never to be again broken. But this was not made known, at first, to the unprofessional watchers by the sick-bed.

They were reduced by that time to their original number, for Raymond Norreys had left them again, long before the morning, and taken his solitary way back to London. Not without an attempt, though, to conciliate Rachel; not without a few words exchanged with the woman who called herself his wife.

For having returned from his mission to fetch Dr. Sherard, he had deliberately sought an interview with her, and obtained it. Had he any hope in so doing? He must have had, else why did his cheeks flush as he found himself in her presence, and his dark eyes glow with excitement as he waited in expectation of her speaking to him first. Yet in vain; for though her features still bore traces of the exciting scene she had passed through, and she distinctly heard her husband enter, she never raised her head, or showed further signs of emotion at his approach, beyond the nervous movement of her graceful hands, which never ceased from the moment that he stood before her to cross and recross each other, interlacing the delicate fingers in their action. She was sitting in the drawing-room, where she had retreated on the doctor's arrival, and was alone. As Raymond caught sight of the determination pictured in her face, he crossed the threshold boldly, and closing the door behind him, set his back against it, as if to resent the possibility of their being disturbed.

And yet Rachel, guessing his identity by the quicker beating of her heart, no less than by the hardihood of his mute approach, still would not look upward for fear of encountering his glance, but remained as he had found her, leaning over the table with an opened book before her, in which the

printed characters were blurred and indistinct, and kept on changing their places, more and more rapidly, as his agitated voice fell on her ear.

"Rachel! I am going away."

Still her lips never moved, only the restless pretty fingers continued their irritating play.

"Do you hear me, Rachel?" he repeated; "I am going back to town."

Then she lifted her head slowly from her pretended occupation, and said, yet carefully avoiding his eye the while, —

"Are you?"

"I had hoped you would have had something more to say to me than that," he urged. "What I have heard this night with respect to the relationship existing between Craven and yourself, and your knowledge of it, whilst it cannot make me regret the tone I assumed at our last interview (because, whilst resting under the same belief, I should be compelled to act in a similar manner to-night), has still had the power to make me deeply deplore the unhappy necessity which prevented you from telling me the whole truth. If I used words to you that night, Rachel, which rankle in your heart now, I ask your pardon for them, and your forgetfulness if you can give it me."

"I have nothing to forgive," she replied. "Under the circumstances, I have no doubt you were quite right to act as you did. It was unfortunate, nothing more."

"Nothing more, Rachel?"

There was such pathos in his voice as he put the question, that her courage sank beneath it. *She* knew how much more — she knew what misery she had felt in that separation; what magnitude her passionate love for him had seemed to acquire from each day of absence. But he had refused it. She had laid it at his feet with so many tears — with so much abandonment of feeling, and he had cast it from him. He had thrust it away — he had told her to give it to the next man (the *next*, good heavens!) who would care to take it from her. He for whose sake, to try and clear herself in whose sight, she had beaten down her worst assailant — pride, had insulted and stung her on her tenderest and most vulnerable point; and the evil spirit had gone out and brought in seven other spirits worse than himself, and they sat and kept high holiday in Rachel's breast that night. They, not she, now answering for her, said, —

"Nothing more! Resting under such a suspicion, I could no longer share your home, your protection, to both of which I have felt, ever since our ill-fated meeting, that I have no claim. Therefore, I came to those on whom I have such, from whom I may take the necessaries of life, and not feel the obligation weightier than their curse."

"But now — am I to leave you here, Rachel?"

"Leave me here!" she echoed, vehemently. Why not? Can you take me anywhere where I shall forget? Here, at least, they do not suspect me, have never suspected me; they take my love and do not spurn the gift." And as she spoke, overcome with the remembrance of her sorrow and her shame, Rachel's face crimsoned and she burst into tears.

But Raymond's hot blood could no longer stand her insinuations with patience, and his next words were as vehement as her own.

"Who suspects you now?" he almost shouted; "who could have avoided it before, Rachel? Do you know that I can *compel* you to return with me to the Abbey Lodge?" She lifted her wet face then, and met, for the first time, his glowing eyes. She could, had she followed the dictates of her woman's nature, have knelt before him in that hour, and laid his foot upon her neck, so entirely did her heart own him for its lord; but the seven spirits were pressing hard upon her, as her love and womanhood fought feebly against them for a moment, and then sunk down again wounded, (though not to death), unable for this time to prove victor.

"I know you *could*, she said, faintly; "but you would scarcely care, I fancy, to have my contempt as well as — as — my indifference."

"What did you say?" he demanded, in so loud a tone that it frightened her, yet she repeated her words at his request, although it was with the same bravado that makes a man risk his life because he is dared to do so.

Then Raymond's voice grew harsh and thick, and as if there was *something in his throat* which he could not swallow.

"That is all you have to say to me?" he said, after a pause.

Very distinct his words were, although he had grasped the door handle as though to steady his frame.

"All," she whispered, after a slight hesitation.

"Then here let our interviews on this side the grave end," he exclaimed, angrily, as he passed hastily through the door, and closed it with a slam behind him.

As the sound struck her ear, Rachel started suddenly to her feet (she had preserved a sitting position hitherto), and pressed forward. For one moment she could scarcely believe that he was gone; for the next, that he would not return. Had he done so, he would have found the woman whom he had left apparently so indifferent as to whether he stayed or went, standing in the centre of the room, with one hand pressed against her laboring bosom as though she would stay its throbs, whilst she listened for some token of his return, with eyes wildly open and lips parted, and a look very like the coldness of despair creeping over her features, as the moments succeeded each other, and yet the door remained as he had left it. Worse still, for she now heard his footsteps distinctly descend the stairs, and reach the hall below. Only fearing she should lose him, as he threatened, forever, already repenting of her affected disdain, Rachel sprung with one bound across the threshold to the landing beyond. Thence she heard her husband's voice in the passage conferring with another, which she recognized as Cecil's. She tried to recall him — her head was whirling with the revulsion of feeling which the sudden remorse that had attacked her, occasioned — her whole form was trembling violently, as she grasped the balustrades for a support, but still her whitened lips essayed to speak the one word, "Raymond." Twice it issued thence — not loudly, for the door of the adjacent bedroom stood half open, and she feared to attract the notice of those within it; not loudly, because her tongue was dry, and when she tried to render her voice clearer by swallowing, no moisture softened her throat, but in a distinct whisper, hard to listen to, painful to pronounce, her husband's name twice sounded over the balustrades; but no answer came. He was talking rapidly, vehemently, with Cecil Craven, and in another minute the hall-door opened — a rush of cold night air poured into the house — and then it closed again, and one pair of feet (she knew them to be Cecil's) commenced to reascend the staircase; but before she could see him to communicate her wishes or her distress, Rachel saw and heard no more.

Raymond Norreys himself, dashing down the stairs and through the hall, had run his head against that of Cecil Craven.

"Holloa!" exclaimed the other; "where are you off to?"

"I am going back to town," said Raymond; "at least, I am going to the station, and shall wait there for the first train. I can be of no use here, and urgent business waits me at home."

"And what about your wife?"

"She will not return with me," he answered, excitedly. "Craven, I do not believe she ever will return to me. That cursed pride has set itself up to such a degree between us, that if I were to humble myself in the dust before her, I believe that, womanlike, she would only delight in crushing me still more."

"Hang it! I'd *make* her," replied Cecil; alluding to Rachel's return to her husband's protection.

"Not if you loved her as I do," said Raymond, in a low voice, and then stopped.

Men are shy of speaking to one another of their love for a woman, particularly when that love is true and deep and unreturned.

"However, let that pass," he added, presently, in a more cheerful tone; "I have news for you, Craven, and for Rachel also, which I wish you would tell her after my departure."

"All right; what is it?"

Then Raymond quickly detailed the circumstances of his altered fortunes and his newly-acquired title; and Cecil Craven shook his hand heartily as he congratulated him upon the same.

"*There's* not a man in the world I would sooner have heard it of than *yourself, Norreys*," he said, warmly, "and that's the truth. A thousand

congratulations, old fellow; of course, you'll throw up the navy at once. And, as to this other business, it will all come right in time, depend upon it."

Raymond shook his head, but said nothing.

"I intend running over to Egham Priory to-morrow," added Cecil, in parting, "to set matters straight with my fiancee, for of course, however unpleasant for her, we cannot, for our own sakes, keep this business of my mother's marriage a secret from the world. I shall look you up in town on my return. In the mean while, good-by, old fellow, and keep up your spirits."

And then Raymond Norreys unclasped his brotherly hand, and went forth alone (except for that heavy burden pressing on his heart) into the pitiless unsympathizing night.

But when Cecil Craven, burning to retail the news he had just heard, had reached, by rapid strides, the top stair of the lofty narrow flight, he found his sister, the newly-made Lady Norreys, fainted on the landing.

In the mean while, Mrs. Northland (as we must henceforth call her) and Dr. Sherard were engaged watching by the side of their delirious patient, and Sir Raymond Norreys, having caught the earliest morning train, was flying back to London. How long the past day appeared in retrospect to him, as he lay back on the carriage cushions, and had nothing to do but to ponder on it! So many unforeseen events had crowded themselves into twenty-four hours that he could hardly believe that only that space of time had elapsed since he walked into the Haymarket cafe, and recognized the murdered form of poor Tom White. And now there were two of them gone, and a third likely, from all appearances, to follow. Well! after all, it was nothing more than had happened to others from the same fatal cause. At the station, Raymond had procured an evening paper, with an account of the railway accident, and a list of the killed and wounded. Fourteen of the first, of the latter sixteen; altogether a goodly number. And amongst the killed, he here read of three and four belonging to the same family, and of them, two were girls in the very blush of youthful promise. There were worse cases apparently than those of men who had lived out the best part of their days. A little further down the list, was the description of a child, name unknown, — had been placed under the care of the guard, age apparently about four years, dressed in a tartan plaid frock, &c.; had on a comforter and muffatees of white and red wool, knitted by hand. As he read the description, Raymond remembered the poor woman who had been so anxious to learn the fate of her little child, and shuddered as he thought this might be the one she had asked for. "Comforter and muffatees, knitted by hand." Could the poor mother have made them herself, and sent them to be worn on this particular homeward journey, for fear her little one should feel the cold whilst travelling? A little thing to muse upon, but it attracted Raymond's attention, and set him thinking upon the troubles of other people, until he felt more reconciled to the contemplation of his own. He had plenty of work before him, not to say excitement, and as the train rushed into the Waterloo Station again, he felt that he should have very little leisure, for the next few days, to brood over the fresh disappointment that he had experienced.

Of course, when he walked into the presence of his mother and sister that morning, with the astounding news upon his tongue that, by the two accidental deaths of the day before, he had become Sir Raymond Norreys, and that Gustavus Northland, turning out to be the father of his wife, had removed the suspicion which had rested on her character with regard to Cecil Craven, they were nearly prostrated by the double intelligence. That her son should by such unexpected means have inherited the baronetcy and estates of Woolcombe Rise was, to Mrs. Norreys, so much a subject for congratulation and self-satisfaction, that she was nearly beside herself with pleasure, and could talk and think of nothing else. Raymond also was very full of what he should do, and where he should go, and how he should act, when he had entered into possession, and only Christine (after she had once wished her brother joy of his good fortune) appeared to take no further interest in the future looming for them all.

"*Why, what has* come to you, Christine?" remarked Raymond, as

ently; "you don't seem half so glad on my account as I thought you would be."

"No one could be more so, Raymond," she replied; "but if (as you say) Mrs. Craven's story has cleared up all the doubts that you had respecting Rachel, why is she not here with you? Why did not she return to Abbey Lodge when you did?"

Raymond looked suddenly grave again.

"That is more than I can tell you, Christine. I gave Rachel the option of doing so, but she refused to accompany me, and I shall not ask her again."

"But what were her reasons?" persisted Christine.

"God knows," he replied, sadly. "Rachel is one of those women who can never forgive an injury, however unintentional. I suppose that (although I had so good a cause for suspicion) she cannot bring herself to forget that I have suspected her, and her pride forbids her acknowledging that such is the case. She would have had me trust her implicitly, as I would an angel from heaven! through evil report and good report; but I am not saint enough to do it, whatever she may be to deserve it! And so the short interview we had was very stormy, and ended in her directly refusing to return of her own will to my protection. And that is all."

"Very reprehensible, indeed," put in Mrs. Norreys, with a feeble shake of the head, which the fact of her son being a baronet could not render altogether sad. "I am deeply grieved at Rachel's conduct, which is very wrong; very wrong, indeed."

"But I don't believe that *is* all," exclaimed Christine, starting up with a vehemence which astonished her mother and brother. "There is more at the bottom of it than you have told us, Raymond, or than we can see. Rachel would never act so for a mere whim, or indulgence of so bad a feeling."

"Christine, my dear," said Mrs. Norreys, "you are forgetting yourself. Your brother must know best. This excitement on your part is very uncalled for."

"In this case I do not believe he knows best," still persisted the girl, her dark eyes beaming with generous ardor. "He loves Rachel more than I do, perhaps; but he does not judge her so fairly. Raymond, is it not so? Does not your heart tell you that there is something else standing as a barrier between Rachel and yourself besides the justifiable suspicion you entertained for her?"

She repeated her question, but he did not answer. He stood conscience-stricken before her. Yes, he remembered only too well how when she had thrown herself upon his breast, cast her arms about him, and poured forth those passionate words, "Raymond, I love you; indeed, I do. I have been too foolish to tell you of it before; but, indeed, it is true"—he had untwined them roughly, those dear, tender arms, and thrust her from him, and told her to her face that she was false in even saying so. And as the recollection pressed upon him, Raymond Norreys felt as if, between love and regret and disappointment, he was going mad.

"Christine," he exclaimed, "for the sake of heaven, cease to speak to me upon this subject! Whatever has been between my wife and me, is past. Whatever might have been, I believe to be also past. I entreat you not to revive a recollection which almost drives me crazy, by questions such as these. Rest satisfied that whosoever is in fault, Rachel, of her own self, told me last night, that if I did not wish to win her contempt as well as her indifference, I should not urge her return to my protection. If after words like those you think I am the man to sue her humbly for what I could demand, you do not yet know how much pride there dwells in your brother's heart. When she wishes to come back to me, heaven is my witness how gladly I shall open my arms to receive her; till then, Christine, all I ask of you on the subject is,—silence."

And after this demand on Raymond's part, neither his mother or his sister dared to give him for the present anything else.

The next week passed actively enough. There was of course a great deal to do preparatory to his entering upon the possession of Woolcombe Rise. By the time that the arrangements for the pompous funerals of the

Archibald and his son were completed, all the preliminary forms were over, and the undisputed heir was at liberty to walk into Woolcombe Hall, and dispense his own orders. For the present they were few; for his mother refused, on any account, to leave the Abbey Lodge, and Sir Raymond had no wish to reign in solitary, miserable splendor on his new domain; he therefore chose to remain his mother's guest until affairs were a little more settled between his wife and himself. In the mean while, having sent in his resignation of the service to the Admiralty, the papers to that effect were being made out at their leisure.

But one day, during that week (it was the day after the funerals at Woolcombe Rise), a black-edged letter came from Brighton for Sir Raymond Norreys.

"Poor Northland's gone," he said, to his mother and sister, in explanation of its appearance. "His injuries resulted in mortification. Craven writes that he is going to the Court to attend the funeral, and wants me to join him there. Of course, I must go."

"And Mrs. Northland!" inquired Christine.

"Remains at Brighton for the present," he replied. "Craven says she is dreadfully cut up by the loss."

"Nothing more?" his sister ventured presently to say.

"Nothing," he rejoined. "What more do you want?"

She had hoped there would have been a word about Rachel, but if so, Raymond did not choose to mention it.

After Mr. Northland's funeral, Major Craven returned to Brompton with Raymond Norreys.

"Craven and I are going down into Berkshire, to-morrow," the latter said, in explanation, "as I want to show him the place before he returns to Brighton."

"Does your mother make any stay at Brighton, Major Craven?" inquired Mrs. Norreys of Cecil.

"Only a few weeks," he replied. "She is naturally shy of returning to the Court, whilst her story is so very fresh. I wish I could have avoided the publicity, for her sake, but it was impossible, particularly as the estate devolves upon me. Raymond and I are very important men, now, Mrs. Norreys, are we not?"

"Very much so," she replied. "I hope that you will each feel, as well as say so, for a great responsibility rests upon you both. I suppose you will be getting a wife next, Major Craven?"

"As soon as I can," he answered, smiling; "but, of course, this mourning for my step-father must put all such things off for a few months; but I have been down to Egham Priory, and, notwithstanding Lady Riversdale's horror at my poor mother's iniquity, have quite satisfied her scruples, as far as concerns myself, for Lady Frances is coming to stay with us at Brighton the week after next. My mother wants me to follow Norreys's example, and cut my profession; but I am rather prouder of my coat than he is, and will not hear of it, though I am afraid there will be no more foreign service for me after marriage."

A great deal more talk of the same kind, but not one word of Rachel — not even an allusion to her. Had Raymond sealed Major Craven's lips, as he had done their own? Christine watched and hoped in vain, no one started the subject, and so she lay wait for Cecil Craven, after dinner, in the hall, and seizing a favorable opportunity, caught him alone, and breathlessly made the inquiry of him, —

"Major Craven, excuse my stopping you, but have you nothing to tell me about my — my sister, Rachel?"

"Your sister! Good Heavens! Miss Norreys, do you really regard her as a sister? I am so glad to hear it. Let us go into the dining-room; I should so like to speak to you about it."

And when he turned to face her, beneath the gas-light, he saw her eyes were full of tears; thereupon he grasped her hand, —

"How good of you!" he said; "I see you feel for her. What is the wretched quarrel between them, Miss Norreys? I have sounded Rachel and I have sounded your brother, but all I can extract from either of them

is, that there is some barrier between them that can never be displaced, and that the kindest thing I can do is not to ask any questions on the subject."

"Just what Raymond says to us," replied Christine; "and more, for he has positively forbidden our speaking of his wife. But tell me one thing, Major Craven—you are in your sister's confidence, I know—does she love my brother?"

"I am *sure* of it," replied Cecil, "although she has never told me so; but I can see it from her present depression and utter avoidance of his name. And with regard to him?"

"He *worships* her," said Christine, eagerly. "I believe he would lay down his life for her. What shall we do, Major Craven? This misery must not go on."

"Of course not," he replied; "it *sha'n't* go on. Miss Norreys, it strikes me you are the very person to bring them together again. You must write to Rachel."

"Do you think it will be of any good?" she asked, timidly.

"It cannot do any harm," he answered. "A brick wall could not divide them more effectually than they are now divided. Do try, Miss Norreys; this business cannot make you more unhappy than it does me."

"I will, indeed," she said. "Thank you for the advice."

"Thank *you* for all your goodness," he replied; "you are just the sister I could have wished Rachel to possess."

CHAPTER XXXV.

CHRISTINE.

The time at Brighton that followed the death of poor Gus Northland was a very trying time for all concerned in it. Cecil Craven had gone to Egham Priory, as he had proposed, the day after the accident, leaving his mother's husband very ill, certainly, but not (as was then thought by all except the doctor) in any danger; but on the second day of his sojourn there he had been recalled to Brighton by an urgent telegram from his mother, and had only returned to find Mr. Northland insensible, in which state he continued till he died.

The shock to his poor wife was extreme. Deeply as she had sympathized and felt with him from the first, in his acute sufferings, she had fully imagined that a few hours of pain and anxiety would see him easy again, and herself with nothing to do but to nurse him into perfected health. This weak, selfish man, with the handsome face and the soft, brown eyes, who had been her first love, and to the influence of her affection for whom she had obstinately made her own stronger will succumb (as we sometimes see clever people in this life worshipping fools), how infinitely dearer he seemed to her, now that he lay on a bed of pain, and had acknowledged his wife and his daughter before the world. That which, to less blinded eyes, appeared a very feeble act of justice, and not worthy to be called an atonement for a long course of egregious selfishness (unbefitting the name of man), served, in her distorted vision, to raise her weak husband to a godlike eminence, before the dignity of which she was ready to prostrate herself.

Whilst Margaret Northland, in the first excitement of knowing that she could once more walk amongst her fellow-creatures, and not feel afraid to lift up her head for fear her heavy secret should be read upon her face, was debasing herself (if pure love can ever be debased) by exalting the puerile conduct of Gustavus Northland into something worthy of more than mortal nature, and deriving her best comfort from the thought of how she would make amends to him for his generous relinquishment of luxuries to which he had never possessed the smallest right, by years of devotion and wifely servitude, the cruel inflammation, which had held him in such torture, was gradually subsiding, only to give place to a deadlier enemy, and one which no art can subdue. When she thought that his pain was over at last, she

had already thanked Heaven for the relief accorded to him, she had to bear the greater pain herself, of hearing that hope for this life was over. Then, indeed, did she lament that the troubles of *her* daughter—the grief, which never could have come upon any of them, excepting as the consequence of her own guilty secret—had been the means of bringing a premature and violent death upon the creature she most loved in this world. Yes, if Margaret Northland ever experienced remorse for the past, and a wild wish to blot out life and remembrance together, it was during those first few hours in which she knew that she and her early lover were to be parted forever.

What wonder that in such a moment even Rachel was forgotten. But the shock once over, the last few half-sensible words uttered, the last feeble breath drawn, and all that was earthly of her erring husband hidden out of her sight, Margaret Northland turned to Rachel for especial comfort. She was *his* child, *his* legacy, the daughter he had acknowledged with his dying breath; had even died to acknowledge, and she should be all the world henceforward to her heart-broken mother. In those days Mrs. Northland neither spoke of Raymond Norreys, nor urged his wife's return to him. She was too eager to keep Rachel by her own side, too occupied in dilating on the early history of her dead father to her; in dwelling tenderly on the story of her own love for him, of his youthful beauty, his goodness, his faith to herself. And although Rachel (not having shared her mother's love for Mr. Northland) could not quite agree with all she now heard in favor of his various admirable qualities, still this lingering on the virtues of the dead man bore something very touching in its simplicity for her nature, and raising the narrator in her estimation, gave her daily a deeper claim upon her love. But although it seemed natural in the first days of her second widowhood that her daughter should be by her side, Mrs. Northland was not so selfish as to entirely forget that Rachel had also her troubles, and that the horizon of her young life was not, at that moment, entirely unclouded. She had determined, as Cecil said, to stay for a few weeks longer at the sea-side. It was impossible that her son could take legal possession of what should have been his from a child, and herself assume her rightful name, and publicly acknowledge her daughter, without a great many remarks being made, and comments passed upon her conduct, which, determined as she now was to face the consequences of her fault, Mrs. Northland could not yet quite contemplate enduring without a shudder. And therefore, until all lawyers' business was concluded and the facts made thoroughly known, it was thought better the widow should continue in retirement. But the excitement attendant on her father's death and burial, and her mother's first grief over, Rachel seemed to loathe Brighton and all it contained. If they remained shut up at home she was restless and unquiet, roaming from room to room and from one occupation to another, as if she could find no rest for the sole of her foot or employment to satisfy her eager mind. But if, anxious to vary the scene for her daughter, Mrs. Northland forced herself to go out driving and to mix, against her own will, with the gay crowd of equipages that daily thronged the principal thoroughfares, Rachel seemed just as much to shun the gaze of strangers as she did her own company. The fact is, she was wretched; she loathed the sound of the sea, which never varied its monotonous tones, but went on splashing and moaning,—rolling in or rolling out, whether human hearts were breaking or rejoicing. And when she was not cross, or appeared to be so, she was despondent. Hour after hour she would sit with idly folded hands, gazing out upon the water, with apparently no object in her head, except so to sit and think. Her mother noticed her moods, and pointed them out to Cecil on his return, and both attempted to approach the subject of her grief with her; but Rachel, far from admitting a comforter or confidant into the secrets of her bosom, became so violently agitated whenever they appeared to wish to gain her confidence, that for the present they thought it better to let her have her own way. She had been told of her husband's sudden accession to wealth and honor, but the news had not seemed to materially affect her. Indeed, in her own mind, it appeared to raise a higher barrier between them than before, for if she retreated from her resolution after hearing that, would he not think that she did, for the sake of sharing his worldly aggrandizement, what she could not be moved to do

for the promise of himself? And so the unnatural state of mind in which my heroine was at that period, actually led her to consider the good fortune which had befallen Raymond as an additional aggravation of her own trouble, and there was nothing she disliked more than hearing herself called by the name of "Lady Norreys." But of the movements and actions of her husband she was kept in full knowledge, for Cecil never spared an opportunity of sounding his name in her ears, generally accompanied by some praise of its owner. At such times Rachel would color painfully, and look at her brother with reproach in her eyes; but Cecil, dearly as he loved her, never chose to take the least notice of such glances on her part, but went on manfully in laudation of some sentiment or exploit of his absent friend. But the second week died out, and then Lady Frances Morgan was expected; and early as it was for her visit, both Mrs. Northland and Major Craven looked forward to it with pleasure, as they hoped her society might do Rachel good, and her presence amongst them make things appear a little more as they used to do in by-gone days. But one day before Lady Frances arrived, there came a letter for Rachel which made her pulses beat quicker, for it bore the Brompton postmark, and was from Christine Norreys. She escaped to her own room when she had received it, and, tearing open the envelope, ran her eyes rapidly over its contents, as she hoped to see the name of the man she had come to yearn for news of transcribed upon the page. And she was not (so far) disappointed. Raymond's name appeared very often in his sister's letter, for she had written freely, and from the outspoken fulness of her heart. She did not disguise from Raymond's wife how unhappy the difference between them made her, their sister, nor how much she would give to see it healed again. But with this, with her own lamentations over the sad quarrel which divided them, and her own asseverations that she was certain that Raymond would be unhappy until it was settled, Christine's pen was fain to content itself. She dared not go further. She dared not make any promises, or give vent to any prophecies on her brother's account, and she had been charged with no messages from him. On the contrary, when she had told him her intention of writing to his wife, and timidly asked if he had anything he wished to have said from himself, Raymond had answered, in a tone forbidding all further parley, that if he desired to communicate with Rachel, he should do so of his own accord. And therefore poor Christine could only suggest what she thought likely to happen, in the event of her sister-in-law seeking a reconciliation, — and such suggestions Rachel would take no heed of. Even the stereotyped formality of "Mamma sends her love," at the close of the letter, was a generous fiction of Christine's brain, because she did not like to send a letter from the Abbey Lodge which did not contain her mother's name. But although Rachel disregarded the entreaties of Christine, and spurned her advice, and considered she was far more capable of deciding on the best management of her affairs than was her sister-in-law, the kind, affectionate letter did her good, and made her feel that all connection with the dear old Abbey Lodge was not yet entirely broken off. And there was one piece of news in it which, while it struck Rachel with surprise, might have made her feel still more kindly towards the writer of it, had she known what pain (notwithstanding that her desire not to aggravate her sister-in-law's troubles made her mention it more lightly than she felt) she had suffered before she had it to relate. For in the latter part of her epistle, and mentioned cursorily, as if she wished to draw as little attention as possible to the fact, Christine had said, —

"I do not know if you will be surprised or not, dear Rachel, to hear that my engagement with Mr. Macpherson is broken off. It seems strange to write of him so formally, after having been intimate with him for so long, but I am thankful now that it has been so, since it enabled me to discover that our tempers would have been certain to clash, had we persisted in the determination to pass our lives together. Therefore it is far better as it is."

"Our tempers," Christine had written, in her wish to the last to shield (as she had ever shielded) Alexander Macpherson's from the censure of the world; but sweet as her own was, she had been unable to shut her eyes completely to the misery which must eventually ensue, did she bring it in daily contact with that of the fiery-headed Scotchman. Her mental

vision had been unfolding itself for some time past, to the great disadvantages which it would entail upon her future position as his wife. She had watched Alick Macpherson for some years, under various circumstances, in which his temper had been tried; some of them the most trivial, and yet she could not remember one in which it had stood the test; and there had been periods when she had seen him so utterly lose command over himself, that whilst they called for her contempt, she could not look back upon them without shuddering. And, added to this, Alexander Macpherson had never ceased to be jealous of his *fiancee*. Not the foolish, but pardonable jealousy of a man very much in love, who grudges a look or word or smile given to another, but yet is satisfied, on confession of his weakness, to receive meekly the playful, well-deserved rebuke, backed up immediately with a double allowance of favors to make it palatable. Such folly is folly, but still allowable. One cannot always be in love, and the happy time for it passes only too soon. But Mr. Macpherson's jealousy was of another, and a meaner kind. It was jealousy that displayed itself with regard to Christine's affection for her mother, for her brother, for her sister-in-law; even for her politeness to mere acquaintances. It was jealousy that could be roused if she differed from him in opinion; if she did not vaunt *his* preferences, his tastes, and his belongings, high above those of other people; and although Christine at one time dearly loved the man, and was quite ready to think more of him and his possessions than she did of any one else's, she was still of an independent spirit that chafed at being laid under continual restraint, and of an honest spirit that scorned to say what she did not really think, even at the risk of offending so important a person as her lover. But the risk was run so often, and the offence given so often, that it almost grew at last to the fact, that Christine must do and think and say exactly as he did and thought and said, or a quarrel arose between them. And, therefore, as the girl's love of honesty was not to be coerced, the quarrels become very frequent, and a source of great grief to her. She tried every method to live at peace with him. She gave in in all things where with truth she could; she bent and twisted her own ideas to try and make them keep pace with his. But it would have been as practicable to trap the God of Day himself, and confining him within the glass shade of a gas-lamp, have expected him to remain there and shine, as to fetter the free spirit of Christine Norreys, until it had shrunk to the narrowed limits of Alexander Macpherson's opinions, and then expected it to live so and flourish. She came to the knowledge of this herself at last, not suddenly, but by degrees, although the full conception of what her existence as his wife would be, burst on her like an inspiration.

She had been engaged to him so long, for nearly four years, and had arrived so gradually at the knowledge of all his weaknesses, and the chance of her marrying him was still such a remote one, that although she had often wept over the constant disagreements that arose between them, and said that things could not go on like that forever, the real truth that her love for him was waning did not appear to have been brought home to her until a few days after Rachel had left the Abbey Lodge and sought Mrs. Craven's protection. There had been some words between Christine and her lover on that occasion, resulting from his having expressed his opinion with regard to her sister-in-law's conduct rather freely, and she had not seen him for a couple of days. Then he appeared one afternoon, having apparently quite forgotten the coolness with which they had parted, to communicate some good news to Christine; which was, that having by some good luck been raised to a considerably higher appointment in the War Office, he should be in future in receipt of a salary which would enable him to make her his wife — as soon as ever she consented herself to become so.

"And now tell me when it shall be, Christine?" said Alexander Macpherson, as he finished his recital, and took the hand in his which he imagined he should so soon call his own. She did not snatch it away, or start from his side, or do anything vehement — it was not in her nature; she even let her hand lie as he had placed it, and simply said, in her own familiar voice, "Alick, I have been thinking of the probabilities of our marriage for some time past (although I had no notion it would be within our power to marry so soon), and if you ask my opinion on the subject, I say *that it had better be* — never!"

Alexander Macpherson, although his mind was of a low and narrow order, still did love Christine Norreys in a measure, and fully imagined that she loved him. At any rate, the idea that she would draw back at the last from fulfilling her engagement had never struck him for a moment; therefore it was with no small degree of excitement that he dropped the hand he was pressing between his own, and said, hastily, —

"Christine, you are joking — you cannot possibly be in earnest."

"Indeed, I am," she answered, quietly. "I would not think of joking upon such a serious subject; and it is because the subject is such a serious one, Alick, that I dare not trifle any longer with your heart or my own. The constant disagreements which take place between us, and on the most trivial occasions, have taught me, little by little, what your unexpected proposal of to-day has made suddenly clear to my mind, that we should never be happy as husband and wife."

"And this after a four years' engagement," exclaimed Mr. Macpherson, starting from her side, and pacing the room rapidly. "I think you might have told me of your intentions before, Miss Norreys."

"If I had come to know them myself, I certainly should have done so, Alick," she replied; "but I have been fighting with my doubts and fears for so long, that I had grown accustomed to the daily combat, and did not know that I was vanquished till this moment. I am sorry," she added, a few tears finding their way into her eyes as she thought of the distress she would cause him; "it seems hard to say so after so long a time, but it would be worse in me to accept your offer, and let you discover the trickery for yourself; for, when I contemplate an immediate marriage with you, Alick, I shrink from the idea, with something more than fear — something that tells me that I do not love you any longer as I used to do."

"And to what do you attribute this sudden change?" he asked, sarcastically.

"It is not sudden," she answered, earnestly; "it has been the growth of years. I see it now, although my eyes were not fully opened to the truth until you spoke to me to-day; but now I feel that we have been laboring under a great mistake, and that if we wish to prevent ourselves being miserable for life we must draw back before it is too late. Indeed, Alick, I must say it — once and for all — I cannot marry you."

"Thank you for the compliment," he returned, with far more anger than sorrow in his tone. "I know to whom I am indebted for your change of mind, Christine, if you do not. I have seen the influence which your brother's wife has had over you ever since she entered the Lodge. I have not misinterpreted her constant covert sneers at my country and countrymen, and her attempt to make things unpleasant for both of us, by drawing you away for secret conferences, and depriving me of your company. I can see plainly enough that the influence and advice of Mrs. Raymond Norreys is at the bottom of this decision on your part, and I am only sorry you should have suffered yourself to be led away by such an evil counsellor. A woman who has disgraced her husband's family by a shameful flight ——"

"You shall not speak of Rachel in that manner in my presence," retorted Christine, firing up in defence of her absent sister; "and you entirely mistake in imagining she has had anything to do with, or even is cognizant of the decrease of my affection for yourself. It has been your own temper, Alick, and that alone, which has parted us. If my determination not to link my fate with yours is a source of distress to you, you have to thank yourself for it — your suspicious jealousy of all my actions — your utter want of self-control. It has been this, and this alone, in you, which, little by little, has killed all my love, by first destroying my respect. How do you imagine that I could, with any degree of confidence, place myself under the guidance of a man who cannot guide himself? What esteem could I have for such a husband? How could I look up to him? And without esteem, Alick, there can be no lasting affection. When a woman has once felt contempt, she may forgive, perhaps, but she can never again feel love."

"Then you mean to say you despise me?" said Alexander Macpherson.

"I despise those phases in your character which I have alluded to," replied Christine, mournfully; "but not you — no, Alick, though I cannot be your wife, I shall never forget, however long I may live, that I once hoped to be so."

But Mr. Macpherson was too irate and insulted at her answering his question in the affirmative at all, to be able to take any notice of the qualification which the latter part of her sentence shed over the commencement. He seized his hat and stick, and prepared to leave her.

"Good-by, Miss Norreys," he exclaimed, as he did so; "I hope you may always feel as satisfied with your own conduct as you appear to do at present."

"But, Alick," she said, "do not leave me like that; I wanted to speak with you, and to part with you as a friend. It is not right that people who have loved as we have should separate in anger. I have spoken for your good as well as my own. I have ——" but the rest of her sentence remained unfinished, for Alexander Macpherson had refused to listen to it, and had left her, almost shutting the door in her face. Then Christine did shed a few natural tears. A woman cannot so easily part with an old and intimate association; and although she felt that she had done right, and would not have recalled her words if she could, she would have wished to separate from her lover in a more peaceable spirit; but the thought that if he had really loved her, and really felt their separation, he would have shown more of sorrowful surprise and less of temper, struck Christine as she wept, and had the effect of drying her tears as she rose, imbued with the conviction that it was much the best as it had happened, and that she was very glad it was over.

But Mrs. Norreys appeared to take a different view of the case. Christine was rather a matter-of-fact girl, and when she had once made up her mind to do a thing she did it, and therefore it was with plenty of determination and an air of perfect calmness that she walked up to her mother's room when her interview with Mr. Macpherson was concluded, and informed her, in a very few words, of the change in her prospects; but Mrs. Norreys's sense of propriety was horrified at the sudden rupture, and her lamentations over, and objections to, the plan were without end.

"Well, mamma," exclaimed Christine, at last, rather testily for her, "it's of no earthly use regretting it now, because the thing is done, and not to be undone. I have no regrets on the subject myself, excepting that I did not come to the same decision long ago, which would have saved me a good many tears, and all of us trouble. But, thank Heaven! that I have been enabled to see my danger before it was too late. I might have married, from the force of long association, blindfold. I have had a great escape."

"But the disgrace, Christine," her mother urged, "and the publicity of such a thing! You do not seem to remember that. What will the Macphersons say? and your own friends who have known of your engagement all along? I am sure I shall be ashamed to show my face out of doors soon. What with Lady Norreys's behavior, and now yours, we shall be the laughing-stock of the neighborhood; — we, who have been remarkable for never making ourselves conspicuous before." When her mother relapsed into one of these whining moods Christine was apt to become a little impatient with her.

"What can it possibly signify, mamma, what people say or think, in comparison with the happiness of my life? Would you have had me risk that in order to prevent idle gossip, or put a stop to rumor? Do you think women like Rachel and myself, in taking the most important steps of our lives, can stay to be actuated by the fear of what our neighbors will think of them? Do they so stop to consider us? And if they did, I should be the first to say they were fools for their pains. We may be mistaken in our ideas of what is the best thing for us to do. Rachel's last act may prove a wrong move, so may this one of mine (though I doubt it), but even if they do so, our lamentations will be for ourselves and our own ruined happiness, not for what our friends think upon the subject. Let them think; let them talk; let them *kill* themselves with talking," continued Christine, in the energy of her indignation, "I, for one, will never stir a jot out of the path which my sense tells me is the safest to pursue, for all the tittle-tattle of London."

"But for your own sake, Christine," still whined Mrs. Norreys. "You should have been careful to consult your friends before so hastily breaking

an engagement of such long standing. Just fancy,—for *four* years you have been known to be engaged to Mr. Macpherson, during which time you have wasted the best part of yonr girlhood (you will be three-and-twenty next birthday, Christine), and spoilt perhaps a dozen chances of settling yourself, and who do you think will propose for you now? It goes greatly against a young woman's chances, Christine; men don't like a girl to have been engaged four years to another person previously. It turns them off, it's a great drawback. I should not wonder now if you never marry at all. It's a great pity that you could not have arranged matters better with Mr. Macpherson. Every one has their faults, and I dare say a little kind talking to might have led him to see the weakness he is guilty of."

Christine's lip had curled more and more palpably as her mother's speech lengthened upon her ears. When it was finished, she said, contemptuously:

"Men don't like! Who wants them to like? Let them keep their likings to themselves! Am I, for so paltry a reason, to link myself for life to a man whom I don't like? And what is a great pity? That I did not patch up, or do not at this moment contemplate patching up, my quarrel with Alick! First, you mistake in thinking that I have had any quarrel with him. Secondly, that if any amount of time or consideration could shake my determination with respect to not being his wife, that I should have made it known to him at all! And further, mamma, you do me great injustice if you imagine that (although I feel a marriage with him would only make me miserable) I could calmly contemplate, in the first hour of my parting with a man to whom I have been engaged, as you say, for years, ever marrying another!"

"You do not mean to remain single for life, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Norreys, who seemed still more horrified at this prospect than the other.

"I do not know," replied Christine, quietly; "but I certainly think of nothing else at this present moment. I know I have acted for the best; but the very knowledge that separation between Alick Macpherson and myself is the best thing for both of us, cannot fail to be a source of pain to me. If I ever marry, of course lies in the future alone. I am not old, mamma; and the probabilities are that I shall do so; but just now, with my late experience fresh upon me, the alternative appears the most desirable lot. Anyway, whether I die wedded or unwedded, I can never regret that I refused to marry a man whom I have ceased to love. No single life, however lonely and unblest, can be so cursed as that of a woman unhappily married. And I think, mamma, if more girls thought as I do on this subject, there would be fewer miserable wives in this world. Rest contented in the knowledge that (notwithstanding the painful scene I have gone through to-day) I am at the present happy; and as long as I have no worse trouble than the want of more blessings than I possess (instead of the want of less curses), you may thank God for the peace of your daughter's life."

And Mrs. Norreys, with the experience of sixty years upon her, felt humbled as she listened to the words of wisdom which proceeded from the mouth of her single-hearted child.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

VERY NEAR DEATH.

"Cecil, you are surely not so crazy as to think of *bathing!*" exclaimed Lady Frances Morgan, as her lover entered the breakfast-room with a very suspicious looking bundle in his hand, which he immediately thrust out of the door again, and upon the hall table.

"Why not?" he replied. "It's a lovely morning, and as warm as a toast."

It certainly was so for the time of year, for one of those autumnal suns had risen upon Brighton which do occasionally, in this climate, cheat us *into the belief* that summer is not quite gone, and make us accountable for *very foolish* actions, which we have sometimes reason to remember and *regret afterwards.*

"So it may be for a walk," pouted Lady Frances; "but it will be frightfully cold in the water."

"Cold! I wish you'd try a good swim against the tide on a day like this, Fan. You wouldn't call it cold, then. It's precious hot work, I can tell you."

"Well! I can't try a good swim, and so I don't know anything about it," rejoined Lady Frances, who had set her heart upon a morning stroll with her *fiance*, and did not admire having to change her plans. "What are you going to do, Lady Norreys?"

"I don't know," said Rachel, lifting her heavy eyes to Lady Frances's face. They had finished breakfast, and she was sitting by the window, watching apparently the passers-by.

"Won't you come for a walk on the pier, or shall we ride? We can do so very well without Cecil; and I want to explore some of the surrounding country. It is just the morning for a ride, so beautifully warm," for the window was open, and the air circulating through the apartment. "Who are you watching for—the postman?"

The color flew violently to Rachel's face as the unpremeditated shaft hit her hard. The fact is, she was watching for the postman, although she would hardly have acknowledged it to herself, and would sooner have done anything than had it thus sharply brought home to her by others. Ever since she had received that letter from Christine (which she had answered without mentioning her husband's name) she had almost, without her own cognizance, watched for the postman. She had risen each day with an unnamed hope fluttering in her breast—a hope which had continued there to flutter, by slow degrees to fail, and then to die, as morning succeeded to afternoon and afternoon to evening, and the several postmen passed their door, or stopping, left letters for every one but herself. She had hoped, unknown to herself, that the sister (from the enthusiasm with which her own letter was written) might strive to influence the brother in her behalf, or that Raymond himself, in the desolation of their enforced separation, might feel the want of the love he had once rejected at her hands, and write a few short words to tell her so. However few, however tardy, so they breathed regret, Rachel in those days would not have scorned them. The hunger which had raged in her own heart (since the night which might have reunited them forever—but had only served to separate them further) had grown to be so great and so continuous, that she would have snatched for satisfaction at the smallest crumb of love that Raymond deigned to throw her. She was not vehement now—the passion and the force seemed spent together; she was simply numbed—numbed to every outward thing, but conscious herself of a gnawing, never-ceasing pain, which dwelt about the region of her heart, and would not cease for effort or for argument, and yet to heal which she had no balm to call her own.

As Lady Frances's random question struck her ear, Rachel rose from her position near the window, and tried to answer it cheerfully. She did not affect a gay or careless manner, for it would have been as much beyond her power as it would have been unsuited to the circumstances through which her family had lately passed.

"I am quite ready to go either for a walk or a ride, whichever you prefer, Frances," she replied; "but I must wait until my mother comes down stairs" (for Mrs. Northland had not been well the last few days, and had lain in bed later than usual). "Unless, indeed," Rachel continued, with a smile, "Cecil finds, when it comes to the point, that looking at the sea is sufficient enjoyment for this weather, and returns to escort you himself."

"Cecil is not likely to do anything of the sort," rejoined her brother, preparing for his start, "so you must be each other's cavaliers for this morning, ladies. *Au revoir!*"

"By-the-by," he continued, re-entering the room (it was a custom of Cecil's always to reappear for a last word), "who do you think I encountered when I was at the Court, Rachel?"

He meant when he had gone there to conduct her father's funeral, for only a week had elapsed since that time.

"How can I tell," she said, coloring, for her husband rushed into her remembrance, but then she added, "unless, indeed, it was Elise?"

"That's it," he replied, laughing, for Major Craven never treated the subject of Mrs. Arundel, except with the keenest satisfaction at the recollection of her late defeat. "Norreys and I were having a smoke together, and had strayed outside the gate, when who should I see but my Lady Arundel, all frills and furbelows, sauntering along the king's highway."

"Did you speak to her, Cecil?" demanded his sister.

"Speak to her, Rachel!" he replied, in the greatest surprise. "What do you think I am made of? I should think not, indeed, nor did she appear to wish to give me the opportunity, for she turned and ran before the enemy's flag. And what is better still, hearing that Laburnum Cottage was in the market again, and the widow desirous to get rid of it at any price, I sent Andrews to the landlord and bought the lease of him. I intend to install my bailiff there for the future — we'll have no widows settling themselves just under our noses, whether we wish it or not. Will we, Fan?"

"No, indeed," said the prospective mistress of Craven Court, as she thought of how nearly its owner had been lost to her by the machinations of the widow under dispute.

"So I hope we have seen the last of Mrs. Arundel," said Cecil, in conclusion, "and now I am really and truly off."

He left the room as he spoke, and soon after they saw him walk carelessly along the sun-lighted cliff, as he made his way towards Kemp Town.

But he had not gone far before he saw the back of a figure leaning over the palings on the opposite side of the road, which struck him as familiar; he crossed at once, and in another moment had clapped Sir Raymond Norreys on the back.

"Why, Norreys!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here; or being here, why are you not in my mother's house? It's a lovely morning, isn't it? Where have you sprung from?"

The face of Raymond Norreys appeared very careworn and restless, as he turned round to answer him.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I am here because I do not know what on earth to do with myself; I feel so restless. I am infinitely miserable, Craven, and that's the fact."

He looked the words as he spoke them. His sister, Christine, had said to him only the night before, —

"Where are you going to now, Raymond? You will wear yourself out, rushing about in this manner, and taking no rest;" and he had affirmed that he had an engagement, or given vent to some equally convenient fiction, knowing all the time, however, that his intention was to go down to Brighton, to be on the spot where she was, to breathe the same air, perhaps to see her as she passed. For the heavier portion of his business accomplished, and the novelty of his altered fortunes gone, as Raymond Norreys's wife, so Raymond Norreys found himself unutterably wretched and alone. As Rachel chafed beneath the slow march of the weary hours, as she hungered and thirsted for a word or look from him she loved, to tell her she was not altogether lost to him; so Raymond chafed and fretted, longed and pined, and could find no diversion in pleasure or forgetfulness in active employment. And this restless hunger had brought him down to try and find a satisfaction however sorry, in gazing on the windows of the house she dwelt in, or watching the door from which his yearning eyes hoped to see her issue.

But anything like a confession of misery or hopelessness from the light-hearted, reckless, bravado spirit of Raymond Norreys, fell with such strange earnestness upon the ear of Cecil Craven, that he felt quite affected by it.

"My dear Norreys," he replied, "I can see you are, but I believe it's all your own fault. In your way, you know, you are as proud as Rachel is; and until one or other of you gives in, this sort of thing will go on. And yet, I believe, that if you were just to summon up pluck to walk into that house, and say two words to her (I know it's not your part, old fellow, but she is only a woman, you know, after all, and we must humor the creatures sometimes), that she'd fall into your arms, and it would be all right. She is quite as wretched as you are, and that's the truth."

"*Are you sure* of it?" replied Raymond, a gleam of hope lighting up his eyes as his friend spoke. "I did not feel it so keenly at first, Craven,

having so much to occupy me, but the last few days I have been nearly mad with thinking of her, and the cause of our separation."

"I am sure of it," said Cecil. "Here, just walk on with me, Norreys, and I'll tell you all about her."

Then the two men commenced to stroll together in the direction Cecil had chosen, and he told his friend so much about Rachel's lassitude and despondency and nervous anxiety, that poor Raymond's step grew lighter with each sentence uttered, until he almost seemed to walk upon air.

"All you have to do, is, to bring down your pride to make the first advance to her," concluded Cecil: "but I won't swear to the upshot of an interview with her otherwise."

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Raymond. "I'd kneel to her, Craven, if I thought she really cared for me. I'd humble myself to any degree; I'd——"

"Well, well, my dear fellow; you need not let all Brighton know your honorable intentions," said Cecil, laughing at poor Raymond's ardor. "You come and bathe with me first, and we'll settle the other matter afterwards."

"Bathe!" exclaimed Raymond, opening his eyes. "Why, you don't mean to say you are going to bathe to-day?"

"Indeed, I am," said the other, "why, the water will be as warm as possible with this sun upon it. You'll come, too, won't you?"

"Not I," replied Raymond. "I've had too much salt water forced on me in the pursuit of duty, to make me care to tumble in it this sort of weather. I expect you will find a little of it go a long way, Craven."

"Not if you were with me," he replied; "I've heard so much of your swimming exploits, Norreys, I wanted you to give me a few examples of the same."

"Ask me six months' hence," laughed Raymond, whose spirits had risen in a most extraordinary manner during the last half hour. "I believe I am considered rather a good swimmer, but I should think the sea, this morning, would be enough to chill any one's ardor."

And it appeared as though the populace were of Raymond Norreys's opinion, for when the two men arrived at that part of the beach, whence Cecil purposed to bathe, there was not a soul within hailing distance, and all the machines were drawn up on the shingles, with their doors locked.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Cecil, impatiently, "I shall start from here, then."

"Better not Craven," was the reply, "you'll be fined before you know where you are. Wait a minute, and I'll find some of the people belonging to those baths."

There was a line of buildings labelled "Baths" within sight, and Raymond Norreys, having applied there, learned that all the proprietors of the machines were away, and the machines themselves laid up for the season.

"You see there ain't many as apply for them at this time of the year," added his informant, "at least, not at this end of the beach, and so it isn't worth their while to stay about with them; but that's my boat you see there, and my lad can handle an oar, and so if the gentleman likes to have himself run out a bit he can, and bathe from the boat's side."

"You had better give up the idea for to-day, Craven," said Raymond, when the former, on hearing the proposal, expressed his willingness to acquiesce in it; "it will be very cold, bathing from a boat."

"I don't care a fig about the cold," replied Cecil, who was rather obstinately inclined when he had once got a notion in his head; and the old seaman strengthened his determination by remarking that,—

"'Twas a beautiful day, to be sure, and a beautiful sea; and he didn't think as the water would be so cold as it had been the week before, and they had had plenty of bathers about then. 'Twas only last Monday as the machines were drawn up," he concluded by asserting, "and they never would have done it if they could have guessed there'd come such a change, but it was a change, to be sure, and would the gentleman please to have the boat," &c., &c., &c.

And the gentleman would please, and so the little craft was launched, and the lad, a boy of fifteen or thereabouts, jumped into it and took his seat.

"Take an oar, Norreys," shouted Cecil, as they prepared to push off from the shore.

"Thanks, I'd rather not, if you can manage without me," returned Raymond.

A moment afterwards he was sorry he had said so; a moment aftewards (Cecil having only thrown him back some laughing rejoinder as he seized the other oar himself) Raymond regretted that he had not gone with his friend—that he had not been subjected to a little more persuasion. But the fact was, he wanted to be alone with his own thoughts for awhile; he could hardly believe yet that what his brother-in-law told him was true—that Rachel was really fretting at his absence and pining for his return. If so, what happiness!—what bliss!—what ecstasy was in store for both of them! But the idea was so new to him; he had been bemoaning her indifference for so long, and of late had so determined within himself that her own assertion to the contrary was false, that he could not all at once take it in, as he wished to do; and therefore, to be alone with this fresh delicious hope, was company—the best of company—to him, and he wanted to indulge himself by a few minutes of solitude before he sought her presence. And yet he was sorry that he had not accepted Cecil's offer, and gone in the boat with him. He could not understand why, but the regret returned more than once, surprising him each time, the knowledge struck him that it was there again. In the mean while he cast himself upon the beach, and dreamt of Rachel. The sunshine certainly felt very warm there, and was inviting, although it had not the power to lessen the deep color in the fingers and noses of some half-dozen little children, who, with their nursery-maid, were all the human creatures within sight of him, for the superannuated sailor had retired again to his chimney-corner, and the boat was no longer within hail. As Raymond lay upon the beach, his cigar between his lips, and that happiest of dreams warming his heart's blood, he remarked how fast the tide was running out.

"If Craven means to bathe this morning, he had better do it," he thought, as he marked the rapid progress of the waters; "he will find it heavy work swimming back against this tide."

The boat had made some distance by this time, and he could see Cecil standing in it and undressing. He tried to holloa out some words to him between his closed hands, to the same effect as the channel in which his thoughts were running, but his efforts were ineffectual, although his action did not pass unnoticed; Cecil Craven shook his head merrily at him, and the wind brought back his words upon the shore, and scattered them. So then he lay down on the shingles again, and resumed his smoking and his train of thought. The nursery-maid, meanwhile, with her charge, all eagerness to watch the exploits of the gentleman in the boat, stood near him, gazing.

Raymond had remained inactive for another ten minutes, when he was roused from his reverie by an exclamation from the girl beside him.

"Look, sir! he's gone—the gentleman's gone!"

"Eh! what did you say?" said Raymond, carelessly—"gone. Ah! yes," fully thinking that she had watched the first plunge into the sea on Cecil's part, and become excited in consequence.

"He ain't coming up again, sir. Look! look!"

This time she touched his arm, and Raymond raised his eyes in the direction of the water. There he saw what made him start to his feet with a loud exclamation, for the lad was standing in the boat, with every appearance of being greatly alarmed, as he waved his oar and his woollen cap alternately, and then gazed over the side, evidently not knowing what to do.

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Raymond, appealing to the excited girl beside him. "Where is he?"

"Please, sir, he's gone down!" she answered. "I told you so. I seed him jump ever so many minutes ago, when you was thinking. He swam a little way out, and then his arms went up, and he went down, and he ain't come up since!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Raymond. "*Cramp.*"

He had been divesting himself of his coat and waistcoat as the nursery-maid spoke, and now threw them in a heap upon the beach.

"*Look* after my clothes," he said, hurriedly. "My watch and purse are here; *and tell* some one, girl, if you can;" and without further thought or

direction Raymond Norreys strode into the shallow water up to his knees — up to his middle — deeper — a little deeper still — and then there was heard a dull plunge, and he was striking out manfully to the rescue of his friend.

It was easy swimming out, for the heavy tide was running fast, and one huge wave but bore him to its crested top, to toss him into the arms of another. Raymond Norreys had not exaggerated his own powers; he was both an able and a gallant swimmer, and he had the courage of a lion. As his well-knit muscles did their work surely, each stroke brought him nearer and nearer to the side of the boat; but as soon as he gained it, the lad hurriedly directed him to a spot some distance further on.

"He went down just there, sir," he almost screamed. "It wasn't my fault, indeed. I can't swim, sir, or I would have gone after him. I'm a deal nearer than I was when he sunk, but I don't see signs of him nowhere."

But Raymond had not stayed to hear half the frantic speech. His practised eye, accustomed to the sea, had spied something on before him, which, to the inexperienced, might have seemed a log, or a mass of floating seaweed, but which he knew to be a human head, and struck out for it. But even as he neared it, it disappeared again, and when it next rose, had been carried far away on the fast receding tide. Again he went on, cleaving with powerful strokes the buoyant waters, never thinking of his waning strength, never calculating on the chances of his own return, whilst a hope remained of bringing that indistinct something before him back to shore.

The nursery-maid had stood staring after him for some minutes after he had entered the water, crying with her excitement and her fear, whilst she admired the prowess he displayed; but then the idea seemed to strike her, dull as she was, that the boldest swimmers sometimes do not return to shore, and under this new dread she deserted her little charges.

"Now, Mary Ann, you just stay along of Charley and Jane and the rest of them, whilst I run to the baths;" and without further preamble she was off.

Once clear of the mass of hard, unyielding shingle, so difficult to tread swiftly, and beyond the beach, her task was easy. Above the overhanging cliff, and on the thoroughfare, a dozen voices and a dozen pairs of hands answered at once to her call for help, and in another five minutes a second boat was launched and manned, and proceeded rapidly, under the stroke of four oars, to the place of the accident, whilst a little crowd collected on the beach to watch its progress, to all of which in turn the nursery-maid related the alarming incidents she had witnessed, acquiring quite an importance in her own eyes from the eagerness with which the various questioners assailed her, and the desire they each expressed to keep her conversation wholly to themselves.

And meanwhile the boat was ploughing the waters, and now had reached the other.

"They are on ahead," shouted the lad, as soon as they were within hail. "He's got him, and turned. They're coming this way."

"And why haven't you steered to meet 'em, stupid?" was the reply he got. "What good do you expect to do looking at them?" And then to one of the men — "Do you see 'em, Tom?"

"Just a head of us," replied the other.

"Now, mates, all together;" and the boat resumed her course. But the next moment the same voice exclaimed, —

"Steady, there! they're down!"

Yes! it was true. He had struck out to the relief of Cecil Craven, encumbered by his shirt and heavy trousers, had gained and rescued him (as far as supporting the senseless form so much weightier than his own above water could be called a rescue), and then Raymond Norreys had turned and attempted to swim back against that cruel tide in support of that heavy burden, and having reached so far, had failed. First, his muscles had performed their office slower, and he had drawn his breath laboriously; then sensation had in a measure deserted him, and he could not any longer feel the grasp he still rigidly maintained upon that inanimate body. And lastly, his own head had become giddy, and his arm, unconsciously to himself had relaxed its hold, and his limbs had failed, and Raymond Norreys knew

hands were empty, and that he himself was sinking. And then the heavy waters closed over his eyes and ears and mouth, and he knew and felt no more.

"Steady, Tom — a little more to this side — that's it; gently, lads, gently — there's another yet. This here's the one as was bathing. That's right, Bill, lay 'em down there, and keep their heads raised whilst we make the best of our way home. I doubt but what the dark 'un's gone, if the other ain't, too. Cover them up with these coats. Well, the Lord preserve us all!"

And in profound silence the men rowed back to shore, although the shout which arose thence, as they lifted the bodies from the water, showed them that their benevolent action had been watched and appreciated.

"And now where shall we take them?" was the inquiry which simultaneously arose from several voices, as the boat was hauled up by friendly aid and grated on the shingles. At first no one answered. The shed of the Humane Society was at the other end of the beach, and no efficient aid was near.

"To the baths," suggested a voice in the crowd.

"But they ain't got no blankets there," said a second.

"Here's a doctor," exclaimed a third, as a professional man who had heard of the accident from a witness above, pushed his way into the assemblage. He walked up to the bodies of Cecil Craven and Raymond Norreys, and lifted the fallen eyelids with his thumb.

"Who are they?" he demanded, shortly.

"I don't know the dark one," replied one of the boatmen; "but the tallest is Major Craven. He's often about here in the summer-time."

"Does he live near?" was the next inquiry.

"Quite close, sir, — at No. — in the Parade."

"Then carry them home at once; they both breathe," was the decisive order. "I will go forward and prepare the family for their arrival. Policeman, keep the crowd off."

And starting upon his errand, he was closely followed by the sad procession, carrying the bodies of the two young men, covered with sail-cloth.

Rachel and Lady Frances had not gone out riding or walking after all, and were still sitting at the dining-room window (now closed), whilst Mrs. Northland reclined in an arm-chair near the fire; for the fictitious beauty of the morning had proved evanescent, and the sky had already resettled itself into its November shade of gray.

"What can all these men be doing?" exclaimed Lady Frances, as the cavalcade first met her eye. "Look, Lady Norreys, they are carrying something between them, — is it a man?"

Rachel, quicker to see things than Lady Frances, instinctively guessed the truth.

"Oh, don't watch them, Frances," she said, shuddering; "I dare say it is some poor drowned creature that they are taking home;" and at that moment the doctor's knock sounded at their own hall-door.

Then there commenced a hurried colloquy in the passage, in which the surprise expressed by the woman of the house was so soon blended with exclamations of horror and tears of commiseration, that Mrs. Northland grew alarmed, and rushed out of the room to learn what was the matter. The girls were about to follow her, when the landlady entered, and essayed to stop them.

"Pray, don't go, my dear ladies, it isn't a fit sight for you, — it isn't, indeed. Ah! poor dear gentlemen; and to think it should happen so soon after the other, and in my house, too. Well, they always say one death makes three."

"Good heavens! what do you mean?" screamed Rachel, as followed by Lady Frances, she darted past her into the passage, just in time to see her poor mother faint in the arms of one of the servants, whilst a crowd of wet men were blocking up the narrow staircase.

"Oh, what is it?" vociferated Lady Frances. "What are they doing? who is hurt, Rachel? who is dead?"

But Rachel did not need to ask information of either herself or others.

"*Cecil, Frances!*" she gasped. "Drowned! Oh, poor mamma!"

CHAPTER XXXVII AND LAST.

HEART TO HEART.

But Cecil was not drowned, and in a short time their fears respecting him were lulled to rest. For before Mrs. Northland had entirely recovered from the death-like swoon into which the news had thrown her; by the time that she had staggered to her feet again, and, putting those aside who tried to stay her steps, had expressed her determination not to be kept from the presence of her son, the doctor bore down upon them with the glad intelligence that for the present they might lay aside their anxiety on Major Craven's behalf, for he had opened his eyes and spoken, and was already on the high road to recovery.

"Thank God!" ejaculated Mrs. Northland, and then she added, though apparently with an effort, "and the other?"

"The other gentleman is not yet conscious, I regret to say," replied the doctor, but he breathes more freely, and there is every hope that our efforts" (he had by this time been joined by a brother practitioner) "will eventually be as successful in his case as in that of Major Craven."

"The other!" exclaimed Rachel; "what other?"

She had been so occupied with reviving her mother since the account of the accident reached her, that she had had no time to make further inquiries, and had believed, until then, that her brother was the only sufferer. Mrs. Northland knew who the other was (for she had seen both the inanimate bodies as they were carried up the stairs), so had Martha Wilson, who was now by her mistress's side, but they neither of them dared to mention the fact to Rachel, and as they hesitated, the doctor, who was a stranger to them all, and had no idea of the connection between the lady before him and his patient, settled the question by saying, —

"Sir Raymond Norreys; at least so I understand his name to be from the servants."

"Raymond," shrieked Rachel; "my husband!"

"Hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Northland, too late, to the doctor; "this is Lady Norreys."

"I am very sorry," he commenced, looking awkward the while, but Rachel waited for no apologies. Straight from the room she went, like an arrow from a bow, despite all entreaties from her mother or Lady Frances, and scaled the staircase to the upper regions. Mrs. Northland attempted to follow her, but fell back upon her chair, as she tried to walk.

"Go with her, please," she said, with quick entreaty, to the doctors. "Give her all the hope you can, she is very young;" and then as the medical man disappeared to execute her wishes, she sunk back upon her cushions and addressing Lady Frances, said, —

"Oh, Frances! is it possible, we are to have another loss? I think all this grief will be the death of me!"

But Rachel heard nothing of this. Swiftly and silently as she had sped from the lower room, did she enter the upper one, where Raymond Norreys had been laid. It happened to be the first she came across, — the same one on the landing where her father had so lately died. As she entered, she saw another stranger, together with some servants, busily occupied near the bed with hot blankets and water-bottles; a man who, ignorant of her identity, looked up jealously from his occupation, as she crossed the threshold, and authoritatively warned her off again.

"My dear lady, you must leave us, you must, indeed. We are doing all that is necessary for the case, and it is no sight for you."

But paying no heed to his words, she walked straight into the room. Then the other doctor followed her, and having whispered to his friend who she was, they said no more, but permitted her to have her way.

"I *must* see him," was all she had whispered, as she advanced towards the bed. Her voice was so determined, as well as her manner, and there was such a tone of low excitement running through her words, that, however much their ideas of propriety may have been shocked at the action

the medical men instinctively retreated a little from the side of their patient, and allowed her to have free access to him.

Yes! there he lay! her Raymond! her beloved, whom she had parted from in anger, but so short a time ago. There he lay, every vein in his body showing leaden color through the clear dark skin; his eyes half opened with a look that made her very soul recoil, it was so like death; his lithe, muscular limbs lying nerveless, rigid, and motionless by his side, and on his naked breast, suspended from a black ribbon, a tiny locket (even in that awful moment Rachel recognized and remembered the far-off time she had given him the childish trumpery toy), with all its gilding worn off, and a lock of ruddy chestnut hair curled round one side of it. As she stood and gazed upon him (though but for a moment), every tear dried in her eyes, whilst the hot fever came on upon her face and made them shine, with a false, unnatural brilliancy. She did not regard the presence of the doctors or the servants; she felt no shame, no reserve, in that dread hour; she only saw before her, as she thought, her dead! and with a hungry eager cry, Rachel threw herself upon the marble body, and burying her face against his, impressed kiss after kiss in rapid succession upon his eyes, his forehead, and his mouth.

But here one of the doctors interposed.

"Forgive me, Lady Norreys, but we cannot possibly permit this. You forget that the patient's life is at stake, and if you wish our endeavors to be successful you will leave us to pursue them alone."

At these words, Rachel raised herself at once from the body of Raymond. She felt ashamed that she should have suffered her feelings to overcome her prudence, and horrified to think that she might even have imperilled by it that precious life. She turned to the medical men as they resumed their efforts, and said, hurriedly, —

"I do not know who you are, gentlemen, but I thank you for reminding me of his danger. For God's sake persevere in your attempts, and do not leave off until you have recovered him. And heaven bless you for them, whether you succeed or no. I am rich," she added, passionately, "but I do not wrong you by supposing that that knowledge will increase your energy; although it can, and it shall, in any case, abundantly reward you; but if you save his life," she continued, with pleading pathos, that almost amounted to a cry of agony, as she clasped her hands together, "I will pray for you — God knows I will — to the very last hour of my existence. You *can*, you *will* save him; will you not?"

Her eyes were flashing like jewels now, as she seized one of the doctors by the arm, and her very soul seemed hanging on his answer.

"We are doing our very best, Lady Norreys," he answered, gravely, "and we have, under heaven, every hope of success. See how much more freely Sir Raymond breathes even now! You can best help us, my dear lady, by praying for a blessing upon our endeavors."

She did not speak to him again; she only took one more hurried glance at the dear face looking so free from all earthly passion, in its awful stillness, and then stole silently from the room.

Outside the door she encountered her mother, whose eyes asked the question which she dared not put into words.

"Better," replied Rachel, in low, measured tones, — "a little better; he breathes. How is dear Cecil, now?"

"Quite conscious, Rachel, though feeling weak, and anxious to see you. He is infinitely distressed about poor Raymond, for it appears that it was in the effort to save your brother's life that he has so nearly lost his own."

Cecil was nearly recovered, and only too willing to talk of the danger he had gone through, and to laud the courage and intrepidity of his friend, by which he had been rescued.

"If Norreys dies," he said several times during that afternoon, "I shall never hold up my head again."

But Norreys did not die. Half an hour after Rachel had seen him he was pronounced to be in a fair way to live, and she was eager to be allowed to go to him. But this Dr. Sherard (who had been summoned to his aid) would not hear of.

"Sir Raymond is excessively weak," he said, "and must be preserved from all agitation. We have not yet told him even where he is."

But as hour after hour went on, and still she was not admitted to his room, Rachel grew impatient. She waylaid Dr. Sherard, and attacked him upon the subject. She was longing to be near him, — employed in his behalf, — taking trouble for him. Now that he had been so nearly taken from her forever, and in so noble a cause, Rachel felt as if she never could do enough to signify her gratitude and love to him.

"Not allowed to go to my husband!" she urged; "it is rather hard, Dr. Sherard, and when even the servants are allowed to pass in and out."

"The presence of servants can have no power to agitate Sir Raymond, Lady Norreys. I cannot say as much for yours. Besides (I grieve to tell you so), — but I do not think an interview with him would be productive of any pleasure to you just yet; because he has been very feverish all the afternoon, and a little delirium has set in — a passing weakness, doubtless, that will be gone in the morning, but, under the circumstances, it is best he should be kept perfectly quiet."

"Delirious — good heavens! Dr. Sherard, is he in danger?"

"Certainly not at present, Lady Norreys, and in the mean while let me entreat you to keep your own mind quiet and at rest."

At rest! How easy to say so — to avdise so! Rachel crept up to her own room after this little interview with the doctor, and groping her way in the dark to the bedside, fell on her knees there, and remained so. Cecil was up again by this time, and seated in the arm-chair by the fire in the dining-room, being petted and made much of by his mother and Lady Frances, whilst he who had rescued him from so dreadful a death — who had been the means of his sitting there ever again; he — her darling — her soul's darling — her lover — her Raymond (Rachel disguised none of her feelings from herself or others now) had recovered his consciousness only to lose it again; had been resuscitated only to fall a prey, perhaps, to a wasting fever, such as her first father died of, which should sap all his strength and energy, and cut him down before her eyes by slow degrees. For Rachel was so miserable that she took a savage pleasure in making the worst of the case. So her mother found her an hour afterwards, when she crept np-stairs to see what had become of her daughter, and to ask her why she did not join them in the warm, cheerful room below. But Rachel would not move out of the dark or the cold. They were congenial to her present state of feeling.

"Leave me alone, mother," she said, "it is the kindest thing you can do. I feel until something is decided about Raymond, that I shall neither care to eat or sleep."

Dr. Sherard had not exaggerated the position in which Raymond Norreys lay; on the contrary, he had made lighter of it than he thought, in order to avoid alarming his wife. For the fact is, he was for some time after that in great danger. The unusual excitement and fatigue which he had gone through for a fortnight previous to his immersion, and during which period he had taken very little food and scarcely any rest, had ill-prepared his frame for the call which had been so suddenly made upon its powers. And to this reason was attributable the tendency to fever which he displayed as soon as animation was restored, — a tendency which before long resolved itself into a severe attack upon the brain, — under the influence of which Raymond Norreys hovered between life and death, till it seemed a lottery which should claim him. By the next day, indeed, Dr. Sherard was enabled to fulfil the hope he had held out to Rachel that she should then be admitted to her husband's presence, simply because he was so insensible to all outward objects that it could not signify who attended on him, so that he was carefully and continuously watched. By the next day a hospital nurse was installed in his room, for he had shown symptoms of becoming violent, and his mother and sister had been telegraphed for, and were staying in the same house, — Mrs. Northland thinking that she never could make enough of the mother, whose son's life had so nearly been given in exchange for that of her own child. By the next day Cecil was walking about the house again, eager to do anything he could to mitigate the suffering his own wilfulness had been the means of entailing upon the whole family, and so anxious and heart-broken about the state of Raymond Norreys that he had no time even to make love to Lady Frances, which defection

on his part that young lady (having recovered her own spirits) resented accordingly.

By the next day little was heard about the house, which sorrow had for the second time so unexpectedly visited, but the whispered conferences which were continually taking place upon the staircase, and the harsh discordance of the sick man's voice, so strangely altered by delirium, as he gave vent in loud terms to the dictates of his disordered fancy; or sadder still, when his unnatural laugh, which made one shudder to listen to, rang over the upper-landing to the hall below.

But, what of Rachel?

She was no longer to be found sitting in her usual attitude in idle thought, and gazing from the windows; nor yet thrown down by her bedside praying with tears and unuttered groans, and hands feebly outstretched into the darkness. She could not bear any longer to remain with folded palms communing with her sorrow. It had become too great a grief for that; had she done so, she would have gone mad. She would not even stay to receive comfort from her mother or his; she would put away from her Christine's pitying kiss; she would fly from the sound of Cecil's or Lady Frances's words of attempted consolation. They meant it kindly — only too much so, but had she given in to their desires they would have driven her wild. No! while that unearthly laughter was pealing through the house — while those unmeaning words followed her wherever she went — she could not remain quiet; she would have died if they had forced her so to do. Days succeeded days, and still the cruel fever continued at its height, and still the delirium was unabated, and so were Rachel's strength and energy. In and out of that sick-chamber she crept; but she was generally inside of it, administering to his wants; giving him food or medicine; cooling his hot head with vinegar and water; or gently sponging his hands and arms. Often she would sit by his bedside for hours together, his hands clasped in her own, whilst he would ramble on to her, in what might almost (so far as its intelligibility went) have been reckoned an unknown tongue, of scenes in which he had mixed, actions which he had done, and events which he had long before forgotten, and which only returned now, that he might torture his poor mind with the attempt to recollect them perfectly. He never seemed to know her; he called her by every name but her own, — that he never mentioned, — but his eyes would follow her light figure as it moved about his room, and his grasp would detain her by his side till she nearly dropped from fatigue, and when she left him he would murmur in a plaintive tone like a fretful child, and she would be back in a moment. She did not stop to ask herself once, what might be the issue of all this; she could not, dared not look beyond the present; and if a thought of the possible future ever loomed upon her mind, Rachel put it from her, with a shuddering horror, and only told herself that whatever happened, her place was here — her heart, her hope, was here; and that she and she only, must nurse him, and live or die, according as he lived or died. The old hospital nurse, who did not see such charms in her patient as her employer did, was used to wondering during her moments of relaxation where "that poor creature, Lady Norreys, got her strength from, for she had never been in bed, to her certain knowledge, since she had entered the house, which was a fortnight come Tuesday, and nursing the gentleman up-stairs wasn't like ordinary nussing either, for a more refractory bit of flesh she never came across, and she'd nussed a many in her day."

But Rachel gained her strength, from a source of which the hospital nurse, in her "ordinary nussings," knew nought; from a source that never wastes, that never fails, never runs dry — the inexhaustible fountain of a woman's love.

But a day came, at last, when Raymond Norreys was pronounced conscious and out of danger. A joyful, never-to-be-forgotten day, when Dr. Sherard announced the news publicly to the assembled family, and was received by a glad shout from Cecil, a flood of tears from the women of the party, and by Rachel (that morning, for a wonder, at the breakfast-table) with a sudden flushing, a deadly pallor, and then a blind stumble forwards, as if she was groping her way in the darkness.

"*She is fainting!*" exclaimed Mrs. Northland, and Mrs. Norreys starting to her aid.

But she recovered herself almost immediately, and attempted to smile at them.

"No! I am not," she said, with difficulty. "I am only stunned with happiness! Oh! Dr. Sherard, may God's richest mercies be yours forever!"

And as she spoke, she took the kind doctor's hand and pressed it to her lips. He, looking down upon her fragile figure, her large careworn eyes, and tremulous mouth, and recalling all the devotion he had seen her display during the last fortnight felt infinitely moved.

"My dear lady," he said, "thank Heaven for your husband's life, not me. I have been able to do very little. His own excellent constitution has been his best doctor; but I trust now that he may be spared for many years to reward you for all your devotion, for I have seldom seen greater. But I must leave you now and go to him. I should prefer your not entering his room at present, as any great agitation might bring back the delirium, and we must have no relapses;" and saying so, he left them alone to talk over his good news.

Mrs. Northland folded Rachel in her arms as she congratulated her, but Mrs. Norreys was almost too agitated to say much.

"May God's blessing be on you!" she began.

"Oh! no!" exclaimed Rachel, while she caught her hand uplifted to her head, and pressed it to her heart instead; "no, dear Mrs. Norreys, don't say that, because I do not deserve it. I love him now as *my life*," she said, vehemently; "but I did not do so always, and I have made him very unhappy. I have allowed my pride to step between us in all our little differences, and prevent the possibility of a reconciliation; but I have been bitterly punished for it. Oh, mother! Oh, Christine! can you, will you, forgive me for the little care I have hitherto taken of a heart so dear to you? For, indeed, I love him now!"

"There is small need to tell us that, dear Rachel," replied Mrs. Norreys. "Whether the fault has been yours or Raymond's, we will trust that all the misery attendant on it is over now and forever, and that the sad trial we have just passed through will carry before it every recollection, but that of the wifely virtues it has called forth in you. And now, my love, you had better retire to your own room, and try and procure a little rest, before you are permitted to return to his side, for I am sure you sadly need it."

Even in a moment like this Mrs. Norreys could not quite lose sight of her habitual prudence, and Rachel, unwilling to thwart her, and accompanied by Christine, professed to do as she desired. But it was an anxious, restless time for her until she was told that she might once more seek his presence. Two hours afterwards the permission was her own. Dr. Sherard had prepared the patient's mind for her reception by telling him, gently, where he was and how he came there.

But Raymond Norreys, after so long an illness, was not like the same creature that, full of hope and ardor, had leaped into the waters to rescue the brother of his wife, the trying fever having wasted his energy and powers of recollection. All remembrance of his interview with Cecil, and the bright future he had anticipated then, had been swept away before the confusion of delirium, and he was conscious of nothing now but a great despondency, consequent upon his extreme weakness. He lay feeling half dead, half alive, and wholly careless of what was before him, as Dr. Sherard broke to him a knowledge of the circumstances under which he came there, and the people by whom he was surrounded. He simply told him that his wife was one of them, and wished to see him. He did not dwell upon the fact that she had nursed him throughout his illness. Why should he? He left that tale of love for her own lips to mention. A then Rachel was informed that the way was cleared for her, and th might reseek her husband's presence when she chose.

Quietly, almost timidly, upon receipt of it, she crept down stairs remembering as she did so, with a sudden pang of what was alm that she had not seen him conscious since *that night*.

When he had fondled and caressed her, he had been insens she was. Would he — ah! was it possible he could look cold *ently, even angrily*, upon her now? As Rachel surmised

the bed-room staircase, she turned cold and leaned against the wall for a support. But his door was open, and she could hear his nurse contending with hin 'bout some medicine which he had apparently refused to take. Dr. Sher..d was gone again, and they were alone. He had always been used to take his draughts from Rachel's hand, and she fancied that even in the midst of his ravings, the touch might have become familiar to him.

"Well, you *must* take it then," she heard the nurse say, "for the doctor was most particular in his directions that you was to take 'em every hour, and it's the proper time. Come now, do take it like a good gentleman." And then Raymond appeared to object again, for she added, though in a lower tone, and more to herself than him, "Well, I wish your lady was here, for any one so tiresome, for opposition and contrariness, *I* never came across."

Then Rachel darted into the room, and approaching the woman, took the glass from her hands.

"Give it to me," she whispered, "I will give it to Sir Raymond; you can go, nurse."

"It's the fever draught, my lady, and he *must* take it," was that worthy's final remark as she disappeared.

Then Rachel summoned up her courage and tried to steady her trembling limbs, as she carried the medicine to the bedside.

Raymond Norreys was lying on his back, vacantly staring at the ceiling. He was terribly changed, and looked more so, now that the excitement of delirium was past. His hair had been cut close to his head, his eyes were dull and sunken, his frame was wasted, and all the bright appearance of his youth seemed gone. When he caught sight of Rachel, his thin cheeks flushed and his eyes brightened, but he did not express any surprise at seeing her there. He was too thoroughly languid and weak to feel any strong emotion; besides, since the doctor had apprised him of his situation, he had lain quiet, trying to collect his thoughts, and some of the past had come back to him, like an old story might do, that we have forgotten entirely, until we take the book up again. But Rachel, knowing that agitation might be very hurtful to him, tried as she caught his eye, to speak indifferently, in order that she might not excite him. Yet how her heart yearnd to fold him next it, in a strong embrace.

"Raymond," she almost whispered, in her effort to be calm, "this draught must be taken, Dr. Sherard said so. You must take everything that you possibly can now, to get up your strength."

"I don't want it," was the childish, fractious answer, as he tried to turn his head away. "It's of no use taking a lot of medicine."

"I am sure you will do so if I ask you." Her eyes were fixed upon his, the while, and as she raised him from the pillow, and held the glass to his lips, he drank it off at once.

"I'm awfully weak," he said, as he sunk back upon his pillow with a sigh.

The ready tears swelled into her eyes, but she tried to keep them from running over.

"You will soon be strong now, Raymond, if you take care of yourself."

"It was touch and go, wasn't it?" he said, presently. "I made certain, at one time, it was all over for both of us."

She was afraid of his dwelling on the horrors of that drowning scene, and tried to change the subject.

"Never mind that now, Raymond; it is all past, thank God. Your life and his have been most mercifully preserved. You should be very thankful."

"What for?" he demanded, turning his face towards her.

"Oh, Raymond!" she cried, her tears refusing any longer to be re-
..d, "you have been in great danger since that. For the last week we
..ought you could have lived, but you have been brought through it.
..ing?
..n't care to live, Rachel," he replied, using her name for the
..would rather have died."
..ch pained to answer, and he saw it.
..have died," he repeated vehemently, a full recollection

the past pressing on him as he spoke. "I would rather have died in the ter, or here, or anywhere, than rise up from this bed to go through the e suffering again that life has hitherto brought me; for there is for me living, Rachel (to be called such) without your love," and he rned his d away again as he spoke.

hen her lips quivered, her eyes refilled, her whole face lighted up with earning sympathy—a deep, uncontrollable love—a passion that be at n pride beneath its feet, and would not be silent any longer.

Raymond, she cried, "my love! my husband!"

e heard her, and he turned—turned with eyes through which his soul beaming like a bright light flashing through a window-pane.

Rachel!" he said.

e did not ask if it was true—if she was certain she did not deceive him erself. He did not question for how long she had loved him, or wonder n the change had come. He only saw her face, and heard her voice, knew it, oh! happy Raymond! for himself. Then he stretched out his e arms into the air, and held them to her; and as Rachel witnessed eak effort, the mighty love surging in her own breast in one moment t all pride and self-deception and false shame before it forever; ith the glad cry of one who has wandered long, but sees his home receive him at the last, she sprung forward to meet their clasp— lay against heart, in one long, passionate, never-to-be-again- brace.

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THE END.

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